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Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Loot of the Vampire

By THORP McCLUSKY

A goose-flesh story—a vivid, eery, blood-congealing weird narrative that will hold your fascinated attention

1. The Pearl Necklace

TWO men sat facing each other across David Eichelman's graceful, kidney-shaped desk. They sat in a room of richness, a room in which every item of furniture, every etching, every rug, every softly toned lamp, reflected impeccable taste. David Eichelman was a jewel merchant of international repute.

The hour was immediately after twilight. The jeweler still wore the conservative business suit into which he invariably changed, each noon, at exactly twelve; his visitor was already in evening dress. . . .

On the desk, between the two men, its leather cover thrown open, lay a small oblong box. Within the box four hundred thousand dollars in matched, strung pearls softly shimmered.

The visitor was speaking.

"You understand my reasons, Eichelman, for making this appointment after your regular hours. The young woman—you understand—and it must be a surprize. One cannot be too careful. You must pardon my inconveniencing you."

The man's words, softly spoken though precisely clipped in the manner of an accomplished linguist, were apologetic. Yet Eichelman, strangely, felt that all the consideration in them lay on the surface, that this lean, saturnine client of his was a creature without heart or human sympathy. For Eichelman was a judge of men as well as of jewels; and so he spread his hands deprecatingly.

"It is no trouble, Your Highness," he said quickly. "I am dining in town tonight; the theater, perhaps, later. I close the shop; I relax—and then you are here."

The client smiled, and in his smile there was no softness.

"You have negotiated with me in complete secrecy, then, Eichelman?" he asked carefully. "It is necessary, for——"

Earnestly the jeweler replied, "The bill of sale will be kept in my personal safe. Only the insurance company will know."

The client seemed satisfied. "Four hundred thousand, I believe you said?" He reached into his breast pocket, withdrew a thin black check-book.

Eichelman bobbed his head vehemently. "Four hundred thousand, yes, Your Highness."

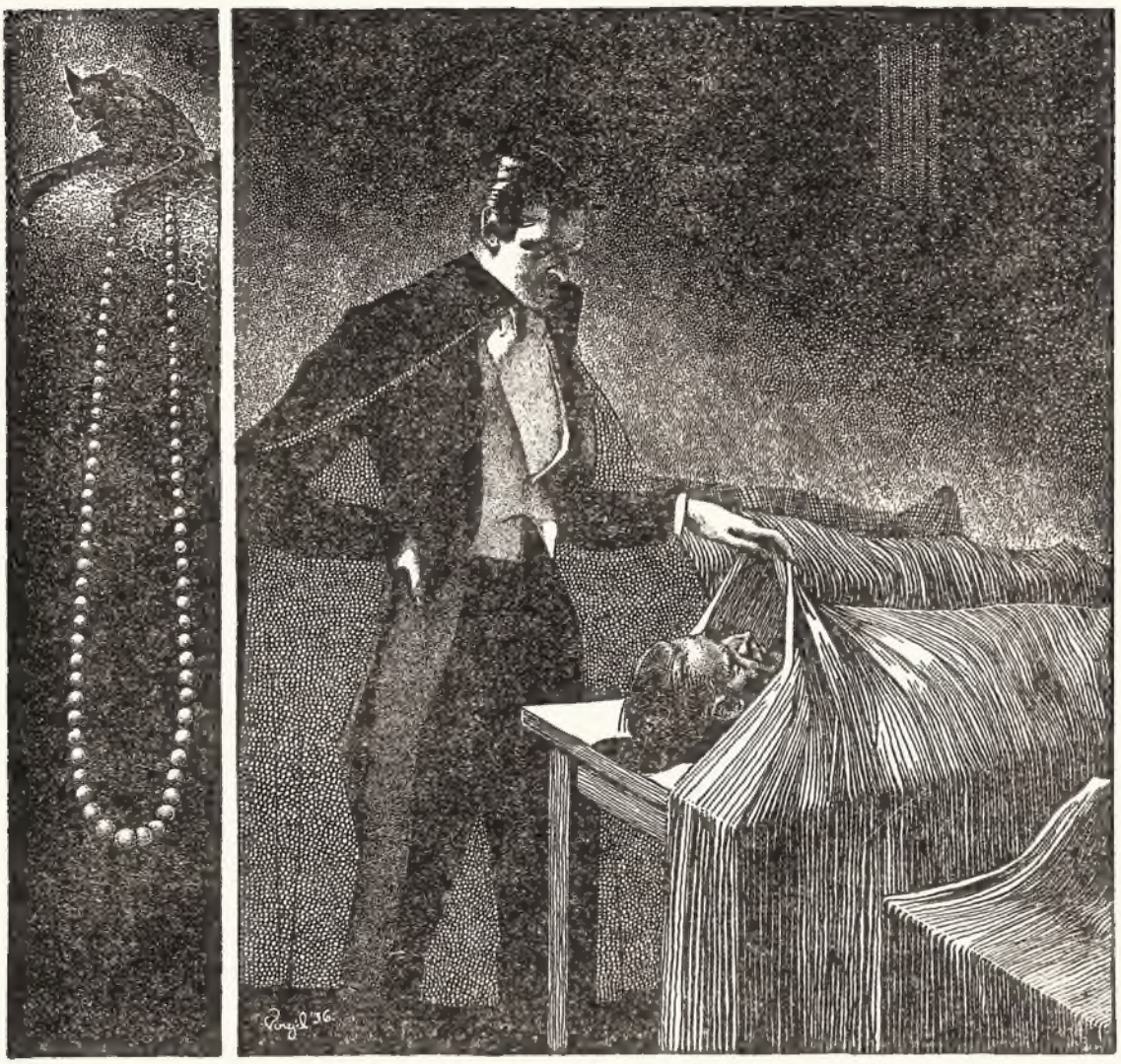
The other stared coldly at Eichelman. "My credit references were good?" he asked significantly.

Eichelman, suddenly choking, stammered respectfully, "Oh, yes, Your Highness. Eminently satisfactory, I must say."

A bleak smile crossed that deeply chiseled face. Without a word the client wrote the check, shook it carefully with his left hand to dry the ink while with his right he restored Eichelman's patrician gold pen to its ink-well.

Avidly the jeweler watched. At last the check was sufficiently dry. The client, as if to tantalize the jeweler, leaned his elbows on the glossy desk-top, held the check up between the thumbs and fore-

"The tall figure moved from slab to slab, lifting the gray sheet from the face of each gruesome unfortunate."



fingers of both hands, directly beneath Eichelman's nose.

The jeweler, staring at the check as a baby might scrutinize some glittering bauble, was not immediately aware that the other's eyes, a scant three inches above the upper edge of the check and less than a foot from his own nose, had fixed themselves inflexibly upon his face. Yet he felt uneasy.

His eyes lifted, met the gaze of that other, a gaze suddenly, incredibly smoldering, yet stone-like too, burning with the unearthly glare of scintillant rubies.

Uneasily Eichelman strove to turn his eyes aside, but could not. His attention had been caught, imprisoned by a will far stronger than his own. Suddenly he felt afraid, felt his mouth go dry and his nerves crumble. He wondered if he were unbelievably dreaming, wondered why he did not speak, yet made no attempt to open his lips. It was as though an enchantment, an hypnosis, had been thrown over him.

He waited, then, for the other to lower

his eyes. But still that mind-shattering scrutiny burned into his skull. And then he realized that his brain was swirling, that a mist was forming across his vision. His client's face had suddenly grown dim; it danced and shimmered before him, lean, pallid, with thin red lips parted in a sardonic smile.

Eichelman, the strong-willed jeweler, knew that his senses were slipping from him like mist from the land, like fog from the water. . . .

2. *Silent Murder*

SEAN O'SHAUGHNESSY, store detective in the employ of David Eichelman, jeweler, playing solitaire in the glass-enclosed bookkeeper's cage near and to the right of the bronze entry doors, was growing uneasy. When Mr. Eichelman had asked him to wait, tonight, he had tacitly admitted that he feared his mysterious client. Yet he had insisted on admitting the man himself, had kept O'Shaughnessy hidden!

It was twenty minutes of eleven. And for upward of two hours O'Shaughnessy's thoughts had strayed more and more from the cards toward speculation, speculation concerning what might be happening behind that closed door, back on the mezzanine floor.

Except for the faint slap of the cards and the sound of his own breathing the store was silent. No murmur of voices came through the thick plate-glass door of Eichelman's office, but this gave O'Shaughnessy no concern; he knew that the men within could be talking with reasonable loudness without the sound of their voices penetrating farther than the mezzanine. Only the sounds of altercation, of physical violence, would carry to where he waited, within a dozen feet of the entrance. And there had been no such sounds.

And yet O'Shaughnessy *knew* that something was wrong, hideously, quietly wrong. At last, as the minute hand of the clock approached eleven, knowing that he faced a severe reprimand from his employer for leaving the bookkeeper's cage without a more tangible motive, he could stand the suspense no longer. Quietly, softly he threaded his way between the shrouded rows of showcases toward the stairs at the back of the store. Crouched just beyond the gleam of amber shining through the frosted glass into the mezzanine, he listened.

From within that closed door came only an unbroken, oppressive silence.

Grimly O'Shaughnessy knocked. There was no response. The silence within the room was tangible, like a living menace.

And then O'Shaughnessy tried the lock on the door. To his surprize, it yielded easily. O'Shaughnessy stepped quickly into the room, stopped short with a sudden, sibilant ejaculation.

David Eichelman sat at his kidney-shaped, mahogany desk, facing the door, but the stranger had vanished!

And Sean O'Shaughnessy knew, instantly, that David Eichelman was dead, even though his eyes were half open, even though he slouched back easily in his chair, his right hand lying negligently on the desk before him. The immobility of his pose, the glaze on his eyes, the colorlessness of his face, told the detective that he was already dead.

O'Shaughnessy leaped toward the window that opened upon the court at the back of the building, peered into the blackness beyond the light from the office. Although it was pitch-dark out there he knew the topography of that courtyard—a blank-walled airshaft between adjoining buildings, a brick-lined chimney up which only a human fly could climb to freedom.

And, too, its importance only just beginning to register upon O'Shaughnessy's

bewildered consciousness, loomed, inches before his eyes, the latticework of half-inch thick steel bars which protected Eichelman's back windows, bars so closely spaced that even the smallest child might not squeeze through!

Feeling a crawling begin at the base of his spine and sweep upward, shriveling the flesh like a needle spray as it passed, O'Shaughnessy gazed idiotically at those bars, at the dead jeweler, while waves of unreasoning, ghastly terror hammered through him. For, although the stranger had vanished, he had not left that room by the door and he could not have left it by the window. . . .

With hands that had suddenly begun to tremble, O'Shaughnessy picked up Eichelman's French phone and dialed the police.

3. *Strange Death*

POLICE COMMISSIONER Charles B. Ethredge missed the first routine turmoil that followed O'Shaughnessy's call to headquarters for the sufficient reason that on this particular evening he had been entertaining at the theater and at supper the young lady he intended to marry. The first inkling he had of the case came as his car drew up softly before her apartment house.

The doorman, saluting respectfully, came hastily forward, extended the Commissioner a penciled note that had been left by a prowl car, anticipating his return to Mary's. Ethredge read the message, turned gravely to his fiancée.

"I must go, dear. A big case has just broken. Eichelman the jeweler's been murdered."

Like the thoroughbred that she was, she offered no objections, asked no questions. "I'm sorry, Charles boy. Call me in the morning, won't you, sweet?" She leaned toward him quickly and kissed his cheek. Then, before he could clasp her in his arms the car door had closed behind her. Just as she entered the foyer she turned, waved to him, smiled. . . .

Slowly he meshed the gears. At first lingeringly, then gathering speed, the long black sedan moved into the city's traffic.

When Ethredge reached the jeweler's, most of the plain-clothes men, the photographers and the prowl-car boys had already left. But Lieutenant Peters of the Homicide Squad, three men from the Detective Bureau, a police physician, and an Assistant District Attorney were impatiently awaiting his arrival.

And in a corner of Eichelman's office rested a gruesome wicker basket, waiting to receive the body for its brief trip to the morgue.

The greetings were terse and matter of fact. Ethredge listened, for the most part without comment, to Lieutenant Peters' brief resumé of the meager knowledge so far at hand. It wasn't much. It was made up half of O'Shaughnessy's story and half of the usual microscopic police search for material clues.

"You are holding O'Shaughnessy for questioning?" Ethredge asked significantly.

Peters grinned and nodded. "His story sounded fishy to me. That stuff about Eichelman kotowing and scraping to some mysterious client he called 'Your Highness' struck me as made out of whole cloth."

Ethredge had been rummaging through the desk drawers. "I see that the treasurer of this firm is a fellow named Ben Sigal. Get him down here. We'll have to find out what's been stolen. . . . No papers on Eichelman that might tell us anything about this mysterious nobleman of O'Shaughnessy's?"

"Eichelman's pockets had been rifled,

Commissioner. Very leisurely and very carefully, I should say."

"Doesn't look so well for O'Shaughnessy," Ethredge commented briefly. Curiously he surveyed the corpse for the last time, preparatory to ordering its removal. "Say! He looks awfully pale! You'd think all the blood had been drained out of him! How the devil was he killed anyway, Hanlon? Make a guess; it doesn't cost anything."

Stiffly Doctor Hanlon answered, "We haven't undressed him, Commissioner. But I've examined him as well as I was able without disturbing him. I can say definitely that there are no major wounds, no traces of poison on the lips or in the mouth, no signs of asphyxiation. The unusual pallor you notice may be due to a form of anemia."

Ethredge laughed.

"In other words, Hanlon, you mean that you won't play. There isn't a mark on him bigger than a scratch; so you say that he hasn't any major wounds. Boy, but you're careful! Well, it looks to me as though he bled to death, with or without wounds."

The bantering tones faded from his voice.

"You'll do the autopsy in the morning. I'll want to know how he was killed, as soon as you've finished."

4. *A Transfusion of Blood*

THE night had aged. The deep blackness that comes before dawn hung over the city like a sable pall; the city slept.

Yet Derwin, the attendant at the morgue, was not asleep. He had just received another body, and now, at the fag end of the night, he was sitting in his little office, trying, with the aid of a detective magazine, to keep awake.

And so it was that he heard those sounds, those faintest of sounds, from that room at his back from which no sound could come!

Grumbling, his horse-face suddenly intent, he stood up, peered through the wire-reinforced square of glass set in the heavy oaken door.

The drama he witnessed robbed his body of strength, set his hands to trembling spasmodically, exploded his meager intelligence into instant insanity.

He saw the tall figure of a man moving from slab to slab, lifting the gray sheet momentarily from the face of each gruesome unfortunate, passing on. And at last he saw that tall figure whip the sheet from Eichelman's body and tumble it carelessly aside.

That tall figure, clad in formal evening clothes! He saw it sit on the edge of Eichelman's slab, bare Eichelman's arm to the elbow, perform the same strange operation upon its own.

From that moment Derwin, mouthing, trembling Derwin, could not have understood, even had he retained his sanity, the significance of what occurred. He could not have realized that the tall figure was giving the dead man a transfusion of its own blood!

And then, while his mouthings turned to inhuman screams, Derwin saw the body of Eichelman, the dead jeweler, stir and sit erect; he saw the lips of the dead man and his weird visitor moving in inexplicable conversation; he watched both men rise and go quickly to the barred window beyond the slabs, leap with inhuman agility to the sill, worm their way between bars so closely spaced that they would not admit the body of a full-grown cat, and disappear into the black night. . . .

Slowly, slowly, as Derwin watched through dazed, mad eyes, the window closed. . . .

And now no sound came from within

that room of death. But from without the oaken door rose the hideous, unending cadence of a madman's screams.

5. The Stolen Body

POLICE COMMISSIONER ETHREDGE, Lieutenant Peters and Mr. Benjamin Sigal sat in David Eichelman's office. It was close to dawn, and the three men were tired, their eyes red-rimmed. On the desk between them lay innumerable bundles of statements and packaged securities. The safe gaped open.

Ethredge addressed Sigal.

"Only the pearls are missing?"

"Only the pearls are missing, Commissioner."

Thoughtfully Ethredge rubbed a finger along his chin. "It would seem that Mr. Eichelman took them from the safe himself," he mused. "His fingerprints, alone, were on the dials."

"That strengthens O'Shaughnessy's story," Peters interjected.

Ethredge nodded. "Yes. Our criminal did not open the safe himself."

Abruptly he resumed his questioning of Sigal.

"Mr. Eichelman, you say, attended to all negotiations concerning these particular pearls?"

"Certainly. Mr. Eichelman personally conducted all the more important business."

"And so you don't know whether or not the list of possible buyers you have shown me is complete?"

"No. I do not."

"Have you heard Mr. Eichelman discuss the pearls with any prospective purchasers, either here in conference or on the telephone?"

Sigal, his brows wrinkling, went into a long resumé of fragmentary conversations he had overheard, of the negotiations concerning which he had been informed, and of others which had seemed more secretive. Suddenly the Commissioner stopped him.

"You say," and Ethredge leaned forward eagerly, "that you overheard him discussing these pearls, on the telephone, with a customer to whom he spoke, deferentially, in both German and English?"

Sigal nodded.

"Find out," Ethredge said slowly, "what customers listed in your files have a knowledge of German. O'Shaughnessy says that when Eichelman let his mysterious stranger into the store last night the man spoke to him, using a decidedly guttural accent."

And Eichelman had addressed that stranger deferentially, as "Your Highness!"

"Find out, too," Ethredge continued, "what members of the nobility were among your customers!"

Suddenly, then, the telephone rang. Commissioner Ethredge forestalled Sigal, who had automatically reached toward the ivory and chromium mechanism, with a quick shake of his head. Picking up the phone, he put the receiver to his ear.

"Commissioner Ethredge speaking."

The voice coming over the wire sounded shatteringly loud in that tensely quiet room. Ethredge, as he listened, had to hold the receiver slightly away from his ear. But he heard the message to the end, put the receiver carefully in its cradle. And when he turned to Sigal and Peters his voice was harsh with amazement, amazement in which there was more than a hint of dread.

"That was the morgue," he said tersely. "Derwin, the night attendant down there, has gone stark raving mad. Eichelman's body has been—stolen!"

6. Perplexed

AT EXACTLY twelve o'clock noon on that, the second day of the Eichelman case, the buzzer on Commissioner

Ethredge's desk at police headquarters sounded loudly. The Commissioner leaned forward swiftly and snapped a switch. The raucous voice of the switchboard operator filled the room. But Ethredge barely listened. Before he answered he had known that it would be Mary. Mary was always punctual.

He met her outside, in the grim stone corridor, clasped her small gloved hands in a brief, wordless greeting. And then they were in the pleasant sunshine, away from that gloomy building which existed only for the punishment of human crime and folly.

"You're extra lovely today, Miss Mary Roberts," he told her, as she linked her arm in his and they stepped into the swirl of the noon-hour throng. She looked swiftly sideways at him.

"You haven't slept, Charles. Your eyes are tired."

He brushed his fingers carefully across his lean, whimsical chin. He had only had time for a shave and a quick shower on his way downtown from Eichelman's. "You're eagle-eyed, Mary." They were passing a small restaurant. "Shall we go in here for lunch?"

As he ate, Charles told her of what had occurred during the night. And Mary, listening intently, was worriedly aware of the grayness that had overspread his face, the perplexity in his eyes, the hesitating uncertainty in his speech.

Gently, then, she said, "You shouldn't try to do everything yourself, Charles. The detective bureau is competent, and, after all, the sun doesn't rise and set in the Eichelman murder!"

"I'm not so sure," he said somberly. "Mary, if we take O'Shaughnessy's word as truth, the fellow becomes positively uncanny. And the snatching of Eichelman's body from the morgue! Who'd believe an incident like that? But it happened. And Derwin's in the City Hospital at this very moment, babbling about dead men walking, about a mysterious stranger in evening clothes coming through the window and engineering the escape of a corpse!"

Gloomily he paused, then went on.

"I was at the morgue myself, this morning. And those windows were—closed."

"But you said that the dust on one window-sill had been disturbed," Mary reminded him. He stared at her.

"So it was," he admitted. "But, heavens, girl, no human being could have crawled through those bars, either at the morgue or at Eichelman's. It's an impossibility."

"That lets out O'Shaughnessy."

"Yes." For a few minutes he was silent, pondering. Then:

"The only clues——" he ticked them off on his fingers. "The man is tall; speaks with a German accent; wears evening clothes; was well enough known to Eichelman so that Eichelman would receive him alone after closing time in his own private office. He can go in and out of barred rooms as though the bars don't exist, and he kills without leaving any trace other than an appearance of bloodlessness in his victim." The worried lines across his forehead deepened.

They rose to go.

"Perhaps," Ethredge suggested, the old whimsical smile that she so loved returning, "you would check about among your society friends. Find out if any of our visiting counts, dukes, or barons seem to fit the specifications!"

7. *A Corpse Returns*

AT EIGHT-FIFTEEN o'clock that evening Officer Baynes, on duty at Eichelman's, heard the brisk rapping of a gold-headed walking-stick on the bronze door-casing. Peering through the glass, he

saw a small, roundly impressive man, seemingly in both an abominable humor and a great hurry to enter the store. Hesitating, the policeman saw the blows upon the door-casing repeated with redoubled fury. Almost instantly the night bell buzzed angrily.

From within the store came the running footsteps of Mr. Benjamin Sigal. . . .

"Dear God; it's Mr. Eichelman!"

The man's exclamation was a cry of sheer horror. His body sagged against the policeman's, the color drained from his face, leaving it yellow as old putty.

Officer Baynes felt a chill like the chill from a tomb sweep him. "Is it him as was *murdered?*" he whispered.

The blows on the door-casing were repeated with exceptional fury. "Open up, Sigal, you damned fool! What are you afraid of? Let me in, I tell you!"

With hands that trembled weakly, Officer Baynes opened the door. David Eichelman entered his own store.

"Don't stand there gaping at me like an idiot, Sigal! Come up with me to the office; I've had a hell of an experience."

For the first time he seemed to notice the officer. And in that instant his eyes blazed with red hate. "Well! They've got the police here watching the store, have they? That's just fine! And now," he stepped forward menacingly, "you get off my property!"

Bewilderedly Sigal protested, "But you were supposedly murdered. The police——"

Eichelman wheeled upon him like a cornered beast. "The police? Blunderers! Do I look dead?" He laughed, and there was something in that laughter that sent the flesh crawling.

"You cop! Get back where you came from!"

The policeman looked helplessly from the irate jeweler to Mr. Sigal.

"I've gotta stay here until I'm relieved." But then a sudden thought struck him. "I can report back that you're alive. That oughta end it. Lemme use the telephone."

Eichelman's face was thin-lipped, stony hard.

"You use no telephone in this store!" he snarled. "You get out of here. You go down the block and call your worthless police. I don't want to see hide nor hair of any of you again!"

Officer Baynes looked imploringly at Sigal. Sigal nodded reassuringly.

"Yes," he said, "better call from the drug-store at the corner. You may say that Mr. Eichelman is safe and that he doesn't want to see any policemen right now. Perhaps in an hour or so——"

"Not in an hour, either," Eichelman rasped. "Tomorrow, if at all. Now get out!"

The policeman retreated before the red wrath in Eichelman's eyes; for Eichelman was a property owner and a taxpayer. Eichelman could make life hard for him if he wished. . . .

Alone with Sigal within the store, Eichelman led the way into his private office. They sat down. Mr. Eichelman did not speak. And as Sigal looked into his employer's eyes an uneasiness began to grow in him, to sweep upward within him until it dominated him, until it became *fear*. For, in some way, Mr. Eichelman had changed, subtly and horribly.

And then, suddenly, Mr. Eichelman stood erect, towered over his employee like an incredible doom. Sigal, looking fascinatedly into those red, red eyes burning down into his own, unable to tear his gaze away, felt mad terror clutch him, blanch his cheeks, stagger his nerve. And then Mr. Eichelman's fingers, strong as steel, were at Sigal's throat, were dragging Sigal, weakly struggling, across the desk top like a bundle of rags. For a

brief instant Sigal saw his employer's face close to his own, saw the hellish triumph in his eyes, the cruel, inhuman sneer on his lips. Then merciful unconsciousness blackened the picture. . . .

8. *Another Victim*

ALTHOUGH things had *looked* all right when he left Eichelman's, nevertheless Officer Baynes knew that he should have contacted Detective-Lieutenant Peters before leaving the premises. And so, within the drug-store, he carefully refrained from mentioning the fact that he had left the jeweler's. He did say that Mr. Eichelman was in a towering rage.

Dismay swept him when Peters rasped out briskly, "That's neither here nor there about Eichelman. You stay where you are until you're relieved. I'll be right up!"

In a tumult of apprehension Baynes replaced the receiver and quickly made his way from the store. Had he been ten seconds earlier he would have seen Mr. Eichelman, carrying a brief-case, come hastily from the bronze portals of his own establishment and walk to a sleek, softly shimmering Rolls-Royce parked a few doors down the block. As it was, he only subconsciously noted the luxurious car, with its three occupants, as it purred past him, gliding with pantherine grace in the direction from which he had just come. . . .

Arriving at the jeweler's, he tried the door, pressed the night bell. Utter silence answered.

Hardly before he had begun to realize the awkwardness of the position in which he had placed himself, a police car rolled up, disgorged Detective-Lieutenant Peters and two plainclothesmen.

"What's the matter here?" Peters exclaimed.

Stammeringly the poor devil replied, "Mr. Eichelman was boiling mad. Told me to get out and stand in the street."

Peters, for a moment, looked at the man. There was something impersonal, almost pitying, in that inspection. Then he said briefly, "I hope everything's all right in there. If it isn't this'll either cost you your badge or send you out pounding pavements in Yaphank Junction."

He jabbed vigorously at the night bell.

"Here, Baynes," he said after a moment, "get to a telephone and call this place; tell them to open up. You say Eichelman and Sigal are inside? Well, we've got right of entry here; this case isn't closed yet, by any means, even if Eichelman *is* alive. There's a jewel robbery on the books yet, don't forget that."

Twenty minutes later, to the accompaniment of a shattering of plate glass, the detectives entered the store.

They found Sigal in Eichelman's office, sprawled grotesquely across the desk, his terror-contorted face blotched with purple, yet white almost to ghastliness, his eyes wide open yet unseeing. With a startled oath Peters dropped to his knees beside the man. An exclamation of relief escaped his lips; for waveringly, faintly, Sigal's heart was still beating.

Roughly Peters forced whisky between Sigal's clenched jaws, drenched water across his face. And gradually Sigal showed signs of returning consciousness. He moaned feebly, his head rolled from side to side, his chest heaved. A detective, at the telephone, had already called an ambulance.

Suddenly, as Peters chafed Sigal's wrists, his eye caught an almost undetectable, reddish mark on Sigal's forearm. It was a puncture, directly over the radial vein, resembling the wound which might have been left by the recent use of a hypodermic needle.

Outside in the street sounded the brief

wail of the ambulance siren. The white-coated ambulance crew entered; without a word the intern dropped to his knees beside Sigal. After a brief moment he looked up.

"This man's in no immediate danger, but we'll take him down to the hospital and put him to bed. That choking," he pointed to Sigal's livid throat, "didn't do him any good. And he's damnably anemic."

But Peters, with a sudden sagging of his squarely-hewn shoulders, had turned to the telephone, was dialing Commissioner Ethredge. For the safe door gaped open, empty jewel-cases littered the floor, a flat steel securities box lay open on the tabouret, and a cyclonic litter of papers was strewn in utter confusion across the red and gold rug. . . .

9. *A Silver-bladed Dagger*

At four a. m. on the third calendar day of the Eichelman case Commissioner Ethredge and Detective-Lieutenant Peters prepared to leave, for the second successive time in as many nights, David Eichelman's store. Intensive hours of baffled investigation had left their nerves snapping and jangling, their bodies dog-weary.

Two hundred thousand dollars in negotiable bonds and twice that value in gems had vanished in the second haul within twenty-four hours!

And at that moment, just as the men were about to lock that ravished office, a call came from headquarters.

David Eichelman's body had been found in a ditch on the Wolcott Beach Road—stabbed through the heart.

Ethredge swore one of his infrequent oaths. But behind that oath lay a renewed eagerness. . . .

Within a few minutes the Commissioner's long black sedan was sliding smoothly through the suburbs, heading toward Wolcott. Ethredge drove in silence; Detective-Lieutenant Peters showed no inclination to talk.

There is no morgue at Wolcott. Ethredge drove directly to the red brick police station. Entering the building, they learned that Eichelman's body, for want of better facilities, had been placed on a couch in the small rest room just behind the sergeant's desk.

The Wolcott coroner was examining the body with a peculiar, strange interest.

Strange, because on the surface it looked obvious, sordid enough. A man lying dead in a ditch with a knife in his heart. The body had been thrown from an automobile; there was no evidence that the murderer or murderers had even set foot to the road.

And yet the Wolcott coroner was studying that body with a painstaking intentness that seemed, somehow, almost fanatical.

He straightened, then, and shook hands with Ethredge and Peters.

"This man, Eichelman," he said puzzledly, "must have been thrown into that ditch sometime after dark last night, so that he'd been lying there a matter of ten hours, at the most, when he was found. Probably much less; he may have been dumped out only a few minutes before he was seen. But he was dead for a good many hours before his body was disposed of. Decomposition had quite definitely set in."

Commissioner Ethredge heard his own voice incredulously ask, "How long has this man been dead, Coroner?"

The Wolcott coroner was very positive. "Not less than thirty-six hours."

Musingly the Commissioner continued, "So that he must have been dead for at least twenty-four hours before he was dumped out in that ditch?"

The coroner nodded. "For at least twenty-four hours, yes!"

Ethredge and Peters looked at each other. They *knew* that Eichelman had been alive at eight o'clock last night! The statement the coroner had just made could not be true.

And yet—it *was* true. The coroner could not be mistaken.

His mind trying desperately to reconcile impossibilities, Ethredge picked up the dagger with which Eichelman had been stabbed, and held it gingerly by the tip of the blade. Something about it had attracted his attention.

"That's a funny-looking blade," he observed casually. "It doesn't look as though it came with the hilt. It looks home-made, as though it was cast in a mold, and then fastened into the hilt and sharpened afterward. Who'd want to do a thing like that?"

Suddenly, then, Peters, in a voice taut with a horror which he alone seemed to understand, gasped, "That blade isn't steel! It's something softer. Silver! It looks like silver to me!"

10. Count Woerz

THE first brilliant rays of the sun were lancing above the horizon in a gigantic golden fan as Ethredge and Peters started back toward the city. Thoughtfully, his eyes alertly watching the road while his real consciousness studied the faint pattern of clues spread out within his mind, Ethredge muttered:

"God knows—we'll *have* to find, somehow, the explanation for these things that puzzle us now. And in the meantime we've picked up another bit of information. We've learned that our criminal drives an automobile."

"I suspect that he drives a Rolls," Peters interjected. "When I had Baynes on the griddle last night he managed to recollect seeing a Rolls pull away from Eichelman's, just as he was leaving that drug-store."

"Check on that," Ethredge ordered grimly. "Or—wait. Better yet, I will let you off at the City Hospital. Sigal should be conscious by now. Ask him if any of Eichelman's customers own Rolls-Royces. I have a hunch that this fellow has traded at Eichelman's. He was acquainted with the jeweler, remember."

"You will be at headquarters?"

Suddenly Ethredge smiled. "I will be at headquarters within an hour. I am going to stop off and beg a breakfast from Mary. She might give me a lead, you know, along with my grapefruit and bacon."

Peters dropped off at the City Hospital. Ethredge drove home, bathed and shaved, put in a brief call to Mary, and continued on to her apartment.

Mary herself opened the door to his ring, ushered him into the breakfast room where already a percolator was bubbling cheerfully, bacon was grilling aromatically, grapefruit beckoned. She watched him, her dark eyes glowing, until he had finished and was sipping his coffee, black and unsweetened.

"What success, Charles?" she asked, then, quietly.

He shook his head wearily.

"And yet, Mary, you might rattle off that list of blooded acquaintances of yours who speak German. And who own Rolls-Royces!"

She closed her eyes, and her lips silently moved as she strove to recollect.

"Well, there's Bunny Brainard. He has a Rolls—but he's no nobleman, and he's girl-crazy. And there's Tony Casteloni; he's Italian, and he has some sort of title, but I don't think he speaks German fluently."

"We'll keep him in mind," Ethredge said, thoughtfully.

"And then there's Leopold—that's Count Woerz; he'd be just the man for you." Abruptly she paused, while a deep blush overspread her cheeks. Confusedly, then, she went on:

"He's sophisticated, you know; satanically handsome; wealthy; cosmopolitan; with a reputation as a heart-breaker. Serpentine, Charles; you loathe him and yet he fascinates you."

Her lashes lowered, her eyes darkened introspectively.

"I was quite intrigued by him myself, Charles, at one time."

"He must be the fellow we're after, then," Ethredge said, laughing.

But Mary resented that. "Don't jest, Charles. Count Woerz is really a fine gentleman. It's just that there's that strangeness about him. It's unfortunate, too. Recently there's been the silliest story going about that Katherine Grant just pined away and died for love of him. If he hadn't looked like that—so—so sort of *devilish*—people wouldn't ever have thought anything of it."

"What *did* she die of, Mary?" Ethredge asked easily.

"Oh, it was some sort of anemia, I think. She had to have dozens and dozens of blood transfusions. But in the end she died. You can see for yourself how silly all that talk was. . . ."

11. The Count Has a Visitor

WAS Count Leopold Woerz the man? Five hours of intensive, pains-taking labor had revealed an amazing series of facts. Commissioner Ethredge and Detective-Lieutenant Peters had definitely learned that Count Woerz *had* traded at Eichelman's—a diamond pendant, a few other small trinkets; they had learned that Count Woerz *did* own a Rolls-Royce, and they had learned that he was Eichelman's *only* noble client who ordinarily spoke German.

Were these facts mere coincidences, or were they a series of delicate clues, pointing unerring fingers toward an elusive criminal?

The additional bits of information the police had managed to secure concerning Count Woerz had not been encouraging. They had learned that he was no bogus nobleman, but that his title and right of entry into America were unquestionable; the Woerz family was one of the oldest and had been, before the war, one of the richest in Hungary. Count Woerz was, in a polite manner, a globe-trotter. He was a man of considerable wealth.

Such was the character upon which Commissioner Ethredge had focused his attention.

Suddenly, with the startling unexpectedness of a dead man coming to violent life, he pitched his unlighted cigar into the wastebasket and stood up.

"I'm going out and pay a call on this Woerz gentleman, Peters," he announced.

Peters, without surprize, nodded. Ethredge strode almost light-heartedly from the room. . . .

Count Woerz maintained his American residence in an ultra-expensive block of apartments; a twenty-ninth story Babylonian palace. Ethredge, debouching from the elevator, found himself in a richly inlaid, cathedral-ceilinged foyer. After a brief, appreciative glance about, he matter-of-factly rang a small bell suspended above a superb table upon which rested a shallow urn, obviously a repository for calling-cards.

Presently the sound of footsteps came softly down a long corridor which extended back into the apartment, and Ethredge was confronted by a pudgy, blond man of indefinite age and oddly vacuous countenance. The footman did not speak, merely waited impassively.

"I would like to see Count Woerz," Ethredge said firmly. He extended his card. The footman took the card between the forefinger and thumb of his right hand and, without looking at it, dropped it in the urn on the table.

"Count Woerz is not at home. Count Woerz will be at home after eight," he said, in a colorless, guttural monotone.

The man was quite probably, Ethredge knew, both an old family servant and an idiot.

"I will return at eight-thirty," he said slowly, trying to make the man understand. The footman bowed stiffly, in a manner reminiscent of a mid-European foot-soldier. . . .

Ethredge left. But promptly at eight twenty-five he returned to that cathedral-like foyer, with its indirect lighting and its vaulted ceilings.

This time the bell was answered by a different man-servant, presumably the butler, a rugged-looking, almost brutish individual, with cruel, thin lips and piercing eyes.

"Come with me, Commissioner," the man said shortly, as he took Ethredge's hat and stick. "Count Woerz has kept this time open for you, and has asked me to show you in to him immediately."

Was there a hint of contempt in his bruskness?

Turning abruptly, the man led the way down the long corridor and stopped at a small walnut door set inconspicuously in the superb paneling. Throwing open the door, he waited while Ethredge entered, then closed the door softly behind him.

THE room in which Ethredge found himself was not large; it was a sort of den-library. The walls were lined up to the height of a tall man with bookshelves, crammed to capacity with volumes which Ethredge saw, even at a casual glance, were both costly and well read. A small desk stood near the center of the room, beneath a brilliant light suspended from the ceiling; at this desk sat a man. A comfortable armchair had been drawn up to within conversing distance of the desk.

The man rose, came out from behind the desk, extended his hand to Ethredge. And Ethredge, as they touched hands briefly, felt a shudder sweep him, exactly as he might react had he touched a snake or a frog. Struggling to control his revulsion he smiled, spoke briefly:

"Count Woerz?"

"Commissioner Ethredge. Please sit down."

Seated, facing the Count, Ethredge studied, without appearing to do so, this man he had so wanted to meet. At first glance he was disappointed; for the Count seemed merely a tall, sparsely built man, apparently thirty-five or so, a man with deeply lined features, smooth-shaven chin, hands of extraordinary length and delicacy, a receding hair-line at the temples, which were slightly gray. He was conventionally dressed in a superb evening suit and snowy linen.

For a few minutes they made small talk. Ethredge in reality did not know what to say, and it was Count Woerz who gently, effortlessly, made conversation. But at last the Commissioner asked bluntly:

"Doubtless you wonder why I am here, Count Woerz."

The Count politely inclined his head. "I would be interested to know, yes. Although our conversation is pleasant, still——" He gestured toward the papers littering the desk.

Ethredge, as always when he felt a battle of wits impending, reached into his pocket and extracted his cigar-case. Opening the case, he extended it toward the Count. Woerz's lips curled in a swift, fragmentary smile.

"Thank you. I never smoke. But perhaps you would like some wine?" And he motioned toward a decanter standing at his elbow.

Ethredge hesitated. But the Count, smiling, poured two goblets of the wine. Lifting his own courteously to his lips, he gestured toward the other. Ethredge took up his glass.

"You knew Mr. David Eichelman?" he asked.

Count Woerz inclined his head. "From time to time I have purchased of him." He spoke casually, yet Ethredge felt convinced that he was alert as any crouching beast. The man's eyes had flamed dangerously.

"You know, then, that he has been murdered?" Ethredge persisted.

Count Woerz shrugged. "That is a matter of common knowledge. I am as well informed as the man in the street, I suppose."

Ethredge paused, for a moment, before he continued. He wanted the full significance of his next words to strike upon the Count without warning.

"You are aware that you have been identified as the mysterious visitor to the Eichelman store? Do you know that you were seen driving Mr. Eichelman from his own store in your car at approximately eight forty-five yesterday evening?"

A lurid glare blazed up, like a clangorous warning, in the Count's eyes, and then as quickly died away.

"You astonish me," he said quietly. "I might suggest that there has been some mistake."

Ethredge, certain as if by direct axiom that Woerz, incredible as it might seem, was the man, bluntly rasped, "There has been no mistake. You were involved in Eichelman's death!"

Foolhardy, to have let his nerves drag from him such a statement!

Count Woerz had leaned slightly forward in his chair.

"Then I am to consider myself under arrest?" he asked.

Commissioner Ethredge shook his head, cursing his own indiscretion.

"Not yet." He rose to go. Count Woerz was looking at him with a curious, gloating expression on his immobile, deeply chiseled face. His thin lips were startlingly blood-red against the pallor of his face. . . .

"Sit down!" The Count snarled the command.

Ethredge sank back watchfully into his chair. Woerz looked at him as one might study some insignificant insect that has suddenly developed a sting.

"A word of warning," the Count pursued significantly. "You are attentive to a Miss Mary Roberts?"

Ethredge let the impertinence pass without a reply.

The Count continued. "At one time she was not wholly indifferent to me. You will pardon me if I seem to speak with too much conceit, but I think that it would not be too difficult a task to win her away from you. That might be my revenge, should you continue to irritate me. As far as the Eichelman matter is concerned, you have made, in coming here tonight, a complete fool of yourself. Good-evening to you, sir."

Commissioner Ethredge stood up angrily. Resisting an impulse to smash the man's lips into his too-pallid face, he turned to go. And then he caught a glimpse of the Count's goblet. It was still full to the brim; the wine had not been touched.

"You have not drunk your wine!" he exclaimed, astonished.

Count Woerz' lips smiled, and behind them Ethredge glimpsed cruel, pearly-white teeth.

"I do not drink wine, Commissioner

Ethredge. It reminds me of blood. You antagonize me, sir; I begin to think that I would sooner quaff a goblet of your blood than drink that wine! And now, please go."

Still with that mechanical, terrifyingly polite smile lingering on his face, Count Woerz watched the door close. Then, thoughtfully, he picked up the telephone and dialed Mary Roberts.

"Mary?" he asked, when the maid had summoned her mistress to take the call. "This is Leopold. . . . I would like to see you. . . . Yes, it's urgent. Shall you be at Moore's bazar this evening? . . . The dinner—I've wriggled out of that, but the gambling should be exciting. I'm to do the mind-reading, you know."

"I am not really . . . intimate with the Moores," Mary protested.

"But you're not doing anything in particular? Then come with me for the latter part of the evening. It should be an experience. . . ."

12. "Like a Wolf!"

COMMISSIONER ETHREDGE, back at police headquarters, sat down at his desk and rested his forehead in his hands. Dear God, what a mess! Not one speck of evidence against Woerz. Baynes wasn't even certain that the car he had seen had been a Rolls. O'Shaughnessy hadn't glimpsed the face of the man Eichelman had admitted to the store. Not one incriminating fingerprint had been found.

And the papers were clamoring for an arrest. . . .

Too, that stubborn coroner at Wolcott had reported Eichelman's body brimming with fresh blood, while twenty-four hours earlier Doctor Hanlon had been as emphatic in the opinion that Eichelman had just undergone a transfusion drastic enough to deplete his veins to the point of anemic death!

How could the body of a man forty hours dead and already in the first stages of decomposition contain an oversupply of living blood?

Feeling that to sit idly there much longer would drive him half mad, Ethredge leaped to his feet, took two swift strides, flung open the door.

"Peters!"

From the doorway of a room down the corridor Peters' head protruded.

"Come in here and keep me company," Commissioner Ethredge ordered, "before I go crazy."

Within his office he told Peters all that had occurred, every word that had passed between Woerz and himself.

"The man's foul," he said earnestly. "I can feel the evil in him just as I'd feel it, looking at a rattlesnake. He's like a wolf."

Almost as though speaking to himself Peters murmured, "Like a *wolf,* Commissioner? I wonder!"

There was a hint of earnestness in the strange remark that startled Ethredge. "What do you mean?" he asked slowly.

But Peters evaded the question. "I'd rather not say any more now, Commissioner. You'd think me insane. But I'd like to see that fellow myself, sometime."

"You'll see him," the Commissioner promised grimly. . . . There was silence between them.

Suddenly Ethredge spread his hands helplessly. "Damn it, Peters; I'm fidgety. I think that I'll go over to Mary's and cadge a drink."

He picked up the telephone. And Mary's maid, answering, told him that "Miss Mary has gone to the Moores'—to the bazar. Count Woerz called for her."

Stunned, Ethredge put down the telephone. He looked across the desk at Peters.

"Are your evening clothes pressed, Peters?" he asked, with seeming ir-

relevance. His voice was strained, unnatural.

"I guess so," Peters assented. "They were pressed fresh for the Saint Patrick's Day ball."

Ethredge wet his dry lips with his tongue. "Well, go home and put them on. We're going to drive out to Mrs. Weston B. Moore's bazar. And perhaps if we're fortunate you'll see Count Woerz, face to face!"

13. Mrs. Moore's Bazar

MR. WESTON B. MOORE was one of the many who had been mushroomed to richness by the Coolidge boom and one of the few who had retained his estate after the crash. A general opinion in more conservative circles was that Mr. Moore had never been overly honest. . . .

Be that as it may, whenever Mrs. Weston B. Moore did anything she did it grandly. Her bazar was no exception to this rule. She had dotted her gardens with thousands of multicolored lanterns. A floor had been put down on one of the terraces where dancing went on, to the purr of a thousand-dollar orchestra. Scattered at a dozen strategic points along the walks and paths a corps of white-coated waiters mixed drinks for the ever moving throng. A score of brightly colored booths, presided over by members of Mrs. Moore's own particular set, were variously billed: *Your Fortune Told—A Night in the Orient—Kisses.* Gambling, at cards and by machine, went on in half a dozen rooms within the house. A troupe of Javanese dancing-girls entertained at hourly intervals on the lawn.

Over all this scene of extravagance and semi-drunkenness presided, reluctantly, it must be said, the Spirit of Charity.

Mrs. Moore herself, a somewhat fleshy, artificial blond, welcomed Count Woerz and Mary at her little table set strategically at the entrance to the grounds. She greeted Woerz effusively; toward Mary she was gushingly polite.

"I *knew* that you'd arrive at just this time!" she chattered. "I was telling all the guests at dinner how you abhor dining out. All those who haven't already met you are just dying to meet a man with such an ecentricity! And when I told them that you were going to tell the fortunes!"

"Not tell the fortunes," Count Woerz corected, smiling. "Just mind-reading, you know. It's merely trickery."

"Oh, but I'm sure there's much more to it than an *act,* Count Woerz! That sounds so sordidly professional. I've told everyone how you've been in Tibet, and China, and all those supernatural countries. You'll be quite the rage. You've always seemed so thrillingly mysterious!"

Count Woerz frowned. "I have never tried to appear mysterious," he said quickly. "I have always tried to seem as —as normal and human as possible."

Mrs. Moore blushed. "You're so modest! But now, I'm keeping you from the bazar with all this prattle. I'm so sorry. Do anything you want to amuse yourselves, my dears, and so glad to see you here, Miss Roberts. And at what time would you like to take a booth for the mind-reading, Count Woerz?"

The Count hesitated. "Well, not too late. Say from—from eleven until twelve. That would give your professional person an hour's relaxation."

Mrs. Moore gurgled ecstatically. "Splendid! I'll have the arrangements made right away. And don't make your —your sittings, or whatever they're called, too long. Just tell each person something startling about himself and then go on to the next. I've built you up into a sensation, Count Woerz. We're charging fifty dollars a sitting for your demonstrations."

Unaccountably, Count Woerz seemed displeased. . . .

As MARY ROBERTS and Woerz strolled slowly about the grounds, stopping here and there to try their luck at the games of chance or to purchase some absurdly over-priced knicknack, they passed the gipsy tent. And this, unlike the greater part of Mrs. Moore's bazar, was genuine. The tent was old and battered; the banner, once gaudy and bright, showed a thousand patches and seams. And the ballyhoo was called out by a hook-nosed, swarthy man with the restless, black eyes of a true gipsy. Two children, squatting timidly on the ground beside the tent, were obviously the offspring of the fortune-teller, Romany wife of the gipsy. Wherever Mrs. Moore had picked up her fortune-teller, and presumably she had engaged the woman through some theatrical agent, she had secured a touch of authenticity which most of her show sadly lacked.

And then a strange incident occurred. Mary had stopped, fascinated, to watch the gipsy children. The man had for the moment discontinued the ballyhoo; for a client had just entered the tent. Count Woerz lounged a few feet away.

The gipsy glanced casually at the Count. The eyes of the two men met.

Perhaps some thought had been in the Count's mind, some thought which had left him temporarily oblivious of his surroundings.

The gipsy, gazing into those blankly staring eyes, suddenly shuddered, shrank into himself, seemed to shrivel with terror. And then, with trembling hand, he made the sign of the Cross!

Abruptly, then, Count Woerz did a strange thing. He grasped Mary's arm roughly, led her away. . . .

"You'll miss the Javanese dancing-girls," he explained, when she protested. . . .

Following the line of booths, they reached the end of the midway. And presently the Javanese girls danced. Mary watched this portion of the entertainment with genuine pleasure; the Count, however, stood beside her with that air of semi-detachment with which he seemed to survey all human activity, as though it surrounded him without affecting him in the least.

As they were returning, Count Woerz looked at his watch.

"Will you dance, Mary, while I'm—entertaining? Or would you prefer to gamble?"

She considered. "I'd rather not dance. So many of the people here are strangers. But I wouldn't mind a whirl at the numbers."

He stopped at the entrance to the house, took a thin sheaf of crisp new bills from his pocket and gave them to her.

"If you win, we share equally. If you lose, the money is lost. What is money?"

14. A Second Too Late

COMMISSIONER ETHREDGE and Detective-Lieutenant Peters reached the Moore's bazar just as the announcement was being blared through amplifiers suspended above the midway, that Count Leopold Woerz was now in the tent of the Past, the Present, and the Future, and that for one hour he would demonstrate the art of mind-reading.

Oddly, Mrs. Moore had commandeered the gipsy tent.

"You wanted to meet Woerz," Commissioner Ethredge said somberly. "Here is some money. I had expected to donate something anyway; it's better invested this way."

About a hundred persons had gathered before the faded tent. Several in the

front rank seemed on the verge of paying their money and finding out for themselves what truth there was in Mrs. Moore's extravagant statements.

The first client, a middle-aged, portly gentleman, had passed through the loose canvas flap into the tent. And apparently Count Woerz, for the benefit of charity, intended to separate these people from their money with the greatest possible dispatch; for in not more than a minute and a half the client popped out again, a slightly dazed expression on his face, muttering incoherently to himself.

Woerz's first success had aroused the interest of the crowd, so that the line had become of respectable length. Commissioner Ethredge felt relief when he saw that Peters had managed to gain a place among the first half-dozen; at that rate he would be inside the tent within ten minutes.

Woerz mowed them down with machine-like regularity. They were only in the tent for a moment; then they came stumbling out, with dazed, half-silly expressions on their faces.

The man must, Commissioner Ethredge mused, be genuinely adept.

And Detective-Lieutenant Peters, now almost at the head of the line, had realized the gravity of the position in which he had placed himself; had determined to keep his mind fixed upon some inane jingle. Particularly, no thought of his should reveal his identity or his profession to the Count.

As he was making this decision he found himself at the head of the line; in the next instant he felt the fifty-dollar fee being taken from his hand, realized that he was passing through the dirty canvas flap into the tent.

Within the tent a single electric light burned overhead; two gilt chairs, a table on which rested the gipsy's professional tools—a crystal ball and a pack of greasy playing-cards—were the total furnishings.

But it was only subconsciously that Peters took notice of these things; his whole attention was riveted on the man sitting bolt upright in the chair before him. Tall, almost emaciated, with aquiline chin and nostrils, the man stared at him through piercing, glowing eyes. For the rest, Count Woerz's face was impassive as the face of a dead man. His cheeks were deathly white. Only the thin line of his lips was brilliantly red, as though artificially carmined.

These impressions flashed through Peters' brain in the span of a second. Feeling something unaccountably like panic welling up in him, he set his mind to repeating, over and over:

"The clouds up in the sky so high; the clouds up in the sky so high."

Count Woerz's thin lips moved.

"Sit down," he said. Then, immediately, " 'The clouds up in the sky so high'; you're resisting. It doesn't matter to me; if you resist you only waste your own money. What's your name?"

Peters' lips were silent, but automatically his mind had answered. The Count smiled.

"Peters. Your occupation? Police officer?" A cold light had flared in his eyes. "That's interesting. Do you know Police Commissioner Ethredge? Do you know me? And you think of me in connection with David Eichelman?"

The Count leaned forward earnestly. "You realize how impossible it is to connect me with Eichelman—how absurd it is. Don't annoy me further, please. . . ."

And then, suddenly as the rush of an electric current along a wire, Peters' brain reverted to its original purpose. And as he thought, simultaneously Count Woerz read his thought, for as Peters' hand plunged into his own breast pocket the nobleman's body catapulted forward, struck the gleaming rectangle from Peters'

hand to the dirt-stained matting. And then Count Woerz's gleaming shoe had crushed down upon it, shattering it into a hundred fragments. . . .

Frantically Peters strove to recall that inane sentence to his mind:

"The clouds up in the sky so high; the clouds up in the sky so high. . . ."

Venomously Count Woerz spoke.

"You have some very peculiar suspicions, Mr. Detective-Lieutenant Peters. I advise you to put them from your thoughts. They belong to the Middle Ages, to Medieval Europe, not to modern America. Should you dare to express them you would be laughed out of countenance. Now go."

He did not know that, in striking the mirror from Peters' hand, he had been a second too late. But Peters' mind was reeling with what he had seen!

15. Mary Roberts

PETERS' face, as he reeled from the gipsy tent, was the color of chalk. His lips were moving as though he was speaking to himself; stark horror gleamed in his eyes.

A pleased gasp went up from the onlookers; Count Woerz was proving a sensation. . . .

Hurriedly Commissioner Ethredge stepped forward, grasped Peters' elbow and led him away from the crowd. Peters was staggering drunkenly.- Ethredge, selecting a deserted spot behind a clump of trees, paused. Peters had not uttered a word.

And then Peters put his hand before his face, retched, and was violently sick!

"In God's name," Ethredge asked hoarsely, "what happened in there?"

Peters shook his head. His face was bedewed with perspiration.

"I can't—tell you now, Commissioner. It's—it's beyond belief. Wait—wait until we get where we can talk. Get—get me a drink, please."

Ethredge returned quickly to the midway, found one of the refreshment booths.

"A tumblerful of rye," he ordered bruskly.

The white-coated attendant's eyebrows flickered, but he filled the order. Ethredge took the drink, put down a ten-dollar bill and turned back down the midway.

As he passed the gipsy tent he suddenly paused. A man had just come from that tent, a man darkly suave, with a livid scar on his left cheek that might have been made, twenty or more years before, by the slash of a saber.

Commissioner Ethredge felt the uncomfortable certainty that he should know this man. . . .

Peters, almost without pause, gulped the whisky Ethredge had brought. It seemed to steady him; with the support of Ethredge's arm he was able to walk back to the midway.

And then Ethredge saw, standing at the entrance to the grounds, Count Woerz and Mary! They were just about to enter Count Woerz's Rolls-Royce. Ethredge grasped Peter's arm.

"Come, Peters; get hold of yourself. We've got to follow them!"

The brutal-looking, animalesque man who had, earlier in the evening, admitted Ethredge to Count Woerz's apartment was now, in chauffeur's livery, closing the door of the car, climbing into the driver's seat. Slowly, then gathering speed, the car slid away into the darkness.

16. Hypnosis

AS THE car rushed softly through the night Count Woerz spoke solicitously to Mary.

"Tired?" he asked. There was a world

of kindliness in his voice. He looked at her speculatively, was secretly pleased. For she was sitting relaxed, with her right cheek turned to catch the caress of the night air; there was no tenseness in her, no watchfulness.

"No, not tired." She fumbled in her hand-bag, drew out a roll of bills which she handed to him. "I lost," she mourned.

He took the money, put it away without counting it. "No matter. I expected you to lose. Did you enjoy playing?"

She laughed briefly. "As well as anyone could under the circumstances, I suppose."

"Then the money is well spent," he assured her.

Presently he spoke again, a little sadly, Mary thought: "Look at me, Mary. You are not afraid of me?"

Their eyes met: the Count's faintly luminous, glowing with gentleness; Mary's warm with the friendship she was trying to give this lonely, misunderstood man. And in her heart was the thought, "People have been cruel to him. They've the —the unconscious feeling that he's a sort of monster. But—he isn't."

"I am not afraid of you," she breathed.

"Look at me," he whispered.

His voice was like the restful music of a muted hymn. Listening to him speak she felt a delicious urge to relax, to let her eyelids droop softly shut. She felt apart from herself, drifting in a dream-world of utter unreality. The night-bound landscape hurrying by, the drone of the motor, the twin-eyed cars that rushed past in frequent crescendos of sound and light, had dwindled from concrete reality to the incorporeality of shadows. The only reality left had merged within Count Woerz's eyes: she felt that if only she could look into them deeply enough she could read there all the unanswerable enigmas of the ages. They glowed like the eyes of a god. . . .

Dimly, deliciously, she felt herself sliding, with ever increasing velocity, down the sides of an infinite vortex. Count Woerz's eyes were expanding, growing into twin suns, lurid, fateful, blood-tinged. The incline down which she seemed to be tobogganing became an almost vertical precipice.

Hot, nerve-torturing fear engulfed her. Desperately she tried to struggle back upward along that incredible slope toward consciousness. But now the precipice had vanished utterly. She was falling, falling, falling with ever increasing velocity into nothingness.

And then Count Woerz's eyes seemed to expand until they filled her whole universe, seemed to explode in a final blaze of malignant light! And after that—darkness. . . .

Count Woerz abruptly sat erect, looked down at the girl sitting, staring with wide-open, blind eyes into the utter blackness of complete hypnosis. The gentleness had vanished from his eyes; they burned in the semi-darkness with feral intensity. He spoke to her.

"You are hypnotized," he said slowly. "I am your master. You will succumb to me whenever I call, wherever you are. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Mary said. No vestige of controlling intelligence touched the words she uttered with personality and life.

The Count bent forward, brushed his hand several times before her eyes, spoke to her. With startling suddenness she awoke.

"Did I—did I faint?" she asked, bewildered. "For a moment I felt terribly dizzy."

"You were—a trifle pale," he reassured her. "It must have been the smoke in the roulette room. . . ."

Don't miss the vivid and inexpressibly weird chapters that bring this fascinating story to an end in next month's issue. Reserve your copy now at your magazine dealer's.

Black Canaan

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A tale of the Southern swamps, and voodoo brought from blackest Africa—a spine-freezing, blood-chilling story of a beautiful quadroon girl who wielded bitter magic

1. Call From Canaan

"TROUBLE on Tularoosa Creek!" A warning to send cold fear along the spine of any man who was raised in that isolated back-country, called Canaan, that lies between Tularoosa and Black River—to send him racing back to that swamp-bordered region, wherever the word might reach him.

It was only a whisper from the withered lips of a shuffling black crone, who vanished among the throng before I could seize her; but it was enough. No need to seek confirmation; no need to inquire by what mysterious, black-folk way the word had come to her. No need to inquire what obscure forces worked to unseal those wrinkled lips to a Black River man. It was enough that the warning had been given—and understood.

Understood? How could any Black River man fail to understand that warning? It could have but one meaning—old hates seething again in the jungle-deeps of the swamplands, dark shadows slipping through the cypress, and massacre stalking out of the black, mysterious village that broods on the moss-festooned shore of sullen Tularoosa.

Within an hour New Orleans was falling further behind me with every turn of the churning wheel. To every man born in Canaan, there is always an invisible tie that draws him back whenever his homeland is imperiled by the murky shadow that has lurked in its jungled recesses for more than half a century.

The fastest boats I could get seemed maddeningly slow for that race up the big river, and up the smaller, more turbulent stream. I was burning with impatience when I stepped off on the Sharpsville landing, with the last fifteen miles of my journey yet to make. It was past midnight, but I hurried to the livery stable where, by tradition half a century old, there is always a Buckner horse, day or night.

As a sleepy black boy fastened the cinches, I turned to the owner of the stable, Joe Lafely, yawning and gaping in the light of the lantern he upheld. "There are rumors of trouble on Tularoosa?"

He paled in the lantern-light.

"I don't know. I've heard talk. But you people in Canaan are a shut-mouthed clan. No one *outside* knows what goes on in there——"

The night swallowed his lantern and his stammering voice as I headed west along the pike.

THE moon set red through the black pines. Owls hooted away off in the woods, and somewhere a hound howled his ancient wistfulness to the night. In the darkness that foreruns dawn I crossed Nigger Head Creek, a streak of shining black fringed by walls of solid shadows. My horse's hoofs splashed through the shallow water and clinked on the wet stones, startlingly loud in the stillness. Beyond Nigger Head Creek began the country men called Canaan.

Heading in the same swamp, miles to

"And that cursed skull danced with her, rattling and clashing on the sand."

the north, that gives birth to Tularoosa, Nigger Head flows due south to join Black River a few miles west of Sharpsville, while the Tularoosa runs westward to meet the same river at a higher point. The trend of Black River is from northwest to southeast; so these three streams form the great irregular triangle known as Canaan.

In Canaan lived the sons and daughters of the white frontiersmen who first settled the country, and the sons and daughters of their slaves. Joe Lafely was right; we were an isolated, shut-mouthed breed, self-sufficient, jealous of our seclusion and independence.

Beyond Nigger Head the woods thickened, the road narrowed, winding through unfenced pinelands, broken by live-oaks and cypresses. There was no sound except the soft clop-clop of hoofs in the thin dust, the creak of the saddle. Then someone laughed throatily in the shadows.

I drew up and peered into the trees. The moon had set and dawn was not yet

come, but a faint glow quivered among the trees, and by it I made out a dim figure under the moss-hung branches. My hand instinctively sought the butt of one of the dueling-pistols I wore, and the action brought another low, musical laugh, mocking yet seductive. I glimpsed a brown face, a pair of scintillant eyes, white teeth displayed in an insolent smile.

"Who the devil are you?" I demanded.

"Why do you ride so late, Kirby Buckner?" Taunting laughter bubbled in the voice. The accent was foreign and unfamiliar; a faintly negroid twang was there, but it was rich and sensuous as the rounded body of its owner. In the lustrous pile of dusky hair a great white blossom glimmered palely in the darkness.

"What are you doing here?" I demanded. "You're a long way from any darky cabin. And you're a stranger to me."

"I came to Canaan since you went away," she answered. "My cabin is on the Tularoosa. But now I've lost my way. And my poor brother has hurt his leg and cannot walk."

"Where is your brother?" I asked, uneasily. Her perfect English was disquieting to me, accustomed as I was to the dialect of the black folk.

"Back in the woods, there—far back!" She indicated the black depths with a swaying motion of her supple body rather than a gesture of her hand, smiling audaciously as she did so.

I knew there was no injured brother, and she knew I knew it, and laughed at me. But a strange turmoil of conflicting emotions stirred in me. I had never before paid any attention to a black or brown woman. But this quadroon girl was different from any I had ever seen. Her features were regular as a white woman's, and her speech was not that of a common wench. Yet she was barbaric, in the open lure of her smile, in the gleam of her eyes, in the shameless posturing of her voluptuous body. Every gesture, every motion she made set her apart from the ordinary run of women; her beauty was untamed and lawless, meant to madden rather than to soothe, to make a man blind and dizzy, to rouse in him all the unreined passions that are his heritage from his ape ancestors.

I hardly remember dismounting and tying my horse. My blood pounded suffocatingly through the veins in my temples as I scowled down at her, suspicious yet fascinated.

"How do you know my name? Who *are* you?"

With a provocative laugh, she seized my hand and drew me deeper into the shadows. Fascinated by the lights gleaming in her dark eyes, I was hardly aware of her action.

"Who does not know Kirby Buckner?" she laughed. "All the people of Canaan speak of you, white or black. Come! My poor brother longs to look upon you!" And she laughed with malicious triumph.

It was this brazen effrontery that brought me to my senses. Its cynical mockery broke the almost hypnotic spell in which I had fallen.

I stopped short, throwing her hand aside, snarling: "What devil's game are you up to, wench?"

Instantly the smiling siren was changed to a blood-mad jungle cat. Her eyes flamed murderously, her red lips writhed in a snarl as she leaped back, crying out shrilly. A rush of bare feet answered her call. The first faint light of dawn struck through the branches, revealing my assailants, three gaunt black giants. I saw the gleaming whites of their eyes, their bare glistening teeth, the sheen of naked steel in their hands.

My first bullet crashed through the

head of the tallest man, knocking him dead in full stride. My second pistol snapped—the cap had somehow slipped from the nipple. I dashed it into a black face, and as the man fell, half stunned, I whipped out my bowie knife and closed with the other. I parried his stab and my counter-stroke ripped across his belly-muscles. He screamed like a swamp-panther and made a wild grab for my knife wrist, but I struck him in the mouth with my clenched left fist, and felt his lips split and his teeth crumble under the impact as he reeled backward, his knife waving wildly. Before he could regain his balance I was after him, thrusting, and got home under his ribs. He groaned and slipped to the ground in a puddle of his own blood.

I wheeled about, looking for the other. He was just rising, blood streaming down his face and neck. As I started for him he sounded a panicky yell and plunged into the underbrush. The crashing of his blind flight came back to me, muffled with distance. The girl was gone.

2. *The Stranger on Tularoosa*

THE curious glow that had first showed me the quadroon girl had vanished. In my confusion I had forgotten it. But I did not waste time on vain conjecture as to its source, as I groped my way back to the road. Mystery had come to the pinelands and a ghostly light that hovered among the trees was only part of it.

My horse snorted and pulled against his tether, frightened by the smell of blood that hung in the heavy damp air. Hoofs clattered down the road, forms bulked in the growing light. Voices challenged.

"Who's that? Step out and name yourself, before we shoot!"

"Hold on, Esau!" I called. "It's me—Kirby Buckner!"

"Kirby Buckner, by thunder!" ejaculated Esau McBride, lowering his pistol. The tall rangy forms of the other riders loomed behind him.

"We heard a shot," said McBride. "We was ridin' patrol on the roads around Grimesville like we've been ridin' every night for a week now—ever since they killed Ridge Jackson."

"Who killed Ridge Jackson?"

"The swamp niggers. That's all we know. Ridge come out of the woods early one mornin' and knocked at Cap'n Sorley's door. Cap'n says he was the color of ashes. He hollered for the Cap'n for God's sake to let him in, he had somethin' awful to tell him. Well, the Cap'n started down to open the door, but before he'd got down the stairs he heard an awful row among the dogs outside, and a man screamed he reckoned was Ridge. And when he got to the door, there wasn't nothin' but a dead dog layin' in the yard with his head knocked in, and the others all goin' crazy. They found Ridge later, out in the pines a few hundred yards from the house. From the way the ground and the bushes was tore up, he'd been dragged that far by four or five men. Maybe they got tired of haulin' him along. Anyway, they beat his head into a pulp and left him layin' there."

"I'll be damned!" I muttered. "Well, there's a couple of niggers lying back there in the brush. I want to see if you know them. I don't."

A MOMENT later we were standing in the tiny glade, now white in the growing dawn. A black shape sprawled on the matted pine needles, his head in a pool of blood and brains. There were wide smears of blood on the ground and bushes on the other side of the little

clearing, but the wounded black was gone.

McBride turned the carcass with his foot.

"One of them niggers that came in with Saul Stark," he muttered.

"Who the devil's that?" I demanded.

"Strange nigger that moved in since you went down the river last time. Come from South Carolina, he says. Lives in that old cabin in the Neck—you know, the shack where Colonel Reynolds' niggers used to live."

"Suppose you ride on to Grimesville with me, Esau," I said, "and tell me about this business as we ride. The rest of you might scout around and see if you can find a wounded nigger in the brush."

They agreed without question; the Buckners have always been tacitly considered leaders in Canaan, and it came natural for me to offer suggestions. Nobody gives *orders* to white men in Canaan.

"I reckoned you'd be showin' up soon," opined McBride, as we rode along the whitening road. "You usually manage to keep up with what's happenin' in Canaan."

"What *is* happening?" I inquired. "I don't know anything. An old black woman dropped me the word in New Orleans that there was trouble. Naturally I came home as fast as I could. Three strange niggers waylaid me——" I was curiously disinclined to mention the woman. "And now you tell me somebody killed Ridge Jackson. What's it all about?"

"The swamp niggers killed Ridge to shut his mouth," announced McBride. "That's the only way to figure it. They must have been close behind him when he knocked on Cap'n Sorley's door. Ridge worked for Cap'n Sorley most of his life; he thought a lot of the old man. Some kind of deviltry's bein' brewed up in the swamps, and Ridge wanted to warn the Cap'n. That's the way I figure it."

"Warn him about what?"

"We don't know," confessed McBride. "That's why we're all on edge. It must be an uprisin'."

That word was enough to strike chill fear into the heart of any Canaan-dweller. The blacks had risen in 1845, and the red terror of that revolt was not forgotten, nor the three lesser rebellions before it, when the slaves rose and spread fire and slaughter from Tularoosa to the shores of Black River. The fear of a black uprising lurked for ever in the depths of that forgotten back-country; the very children absorbed it in their cradles.

"What makes you think it might be an uprising?" I asked.

"The niggers have all quit the fields, for one thing. They've all got business in Goshen. I ain't seen a nigger nigh Grimesville for a week. *The town niggers have pulled out.*"

In Canaan we still draw a distinction born in antebellum days. "Town-niggers" are descendants of the house-servants of the old days, and most of them live in or near Grimesville. There are not many, compared to the mass of "swamp-niggers" who dwell on tiny farms along the creeks and the edge of the swamps, or in the black village of Goshen, on the Tularoosa. They are descendants of the field-hands of other days, and, untouched by the mellow civilization which refined the natures of the house-servants, they remain as primitive as their African ancestors.

"Where have the town-niggers gone?" I asked.

"Nobody knows. They lit out a week ago. Probably hidin' down on Black River. If we win, they'll come back. If

we don't, they'll take refuge in Sharpsville."

I found his matter-of-factness a bit ghastly, as if the actuality of the uprising were an assured fact.

"Well, what have you done?" I demanded.

"Ain't much we could do," he confessed. "The niggers ain't made no open move, outside of killin' Ridge Jackson; and we couldn't prove who done that, or why they done it.

"They ain't done nothin' but clear out. But that's mighty suspicious. We can't keep from thinkin' Saul Stark's behind it."

"Who is this fellow?" I asked.

"I told you all I know, already. He got permission to settle in that old deserted cabin on the Neck; a great big black devil that talks better English than I like to hear a nigger talk. But he was respectful enough. He had three or four big South Carolina bucks with him, and a brown wench which we don't know whether she's his daughter, sister, wife or what. He ain't been in to Grimesville but that one time, and a few weeks after he came to Canaan, the niggers begun actin' curious. Some of the boys wanted to ride over to Goshen and have a showdown, but that's takin' a desperate chance."

I knew he was thinking of a ghastly tale told us by our grandfathers of how a punitive expedition from Grimesville was once ambushed and butchered among the dense thickets that masked Goshen, then a rendezvous for runaway slaves, while another red-handed band devastated Grimesville, left defenseless by that reckless invasion.

"Might take all the men to get Saul Stark," said McBride. "And we don't dare leave the town unprotected. But we'll soon have to—hello, what's this?"

WE HAD emerged from the trees and were just entering the village of Grimesville, the community center of the white population of Canaan. It was not pretentious. Log cabins, neat and whitewashed, were plentiful enough. Small cottages clustered about big, old-fashioned houses which sheltered the rude aristocracy of that backwoods democracy. All the "planter" families lived "in town". "The country" was occupied by their tenants, and by the small independent farmers, white and black.

A small log cabin stood near the point where the road wound out of the deep forest. Voices emanated from it, in accents of menace, and a tall lanky figure, rifle in hand, stood at the door.

"Howdy, Esau!" this man hailed us. "By golly, if it ain't Kirby Buckner! Glad to see you, Kirby."

"What's up, Dick?" asked McBride.

"Got a nigger in the shack, tryin' to make him talk. Bill Reynolds seen him sneakin' past the edge of town about daylight, and nabbed him."

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Tope Sorley. John Willoughby's gone after a blacksnake."

With a smothered oath I swung off my horse and strode in, followed by McBride. Half a dozen men in boots and gun-belts clustered about a pathetic figure cowering on an old broken bunk. Tope Sorley (his forebears had adopted the name of the family that owned them, in slave days) was a pitiable sight just then. His skin was ashy, his teeth chattered spasmodically, and his eyes seemed to be trying to roll back into his head.

"Here's Kirby!" ejaculated one of the men as I pushed my way through the group. "I'll bet he'll make this coon talk!"

"Here comes John with the blacksnake!" shouted someone, and a tremor ran through Tope Sorley's shivering body.

I pushed aside the butt of the ugly whip thrust eagerly into my hand.

"Tope," I said, "you've worked one of my father's farms for years. Has any Buckner ever treated you any way but square?"

"Nossuh," came faintly.

"Then what are you afraid of? Why don't you speak up? Something's going on in the swamps. *You* know, and I want you to tell us—why the town niggers have all run away, why Ridge Jackson was killed, why the swamp niggers are acting so mysteriously."

"And what kind of devilment that cussed Saul Stark's cookin' up over on Tularoosa!" shouted one of the men.

Tope seemed to shrink into himself at the mention of Stark.

"I don't dast," he shuddered. "He'd put me in de swamp!"

"Who?" I demanded. "Stark? Is Stark a conjer man?"

Tope sank his head in his hands and did not answer. I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"Tope," I said, "you know if you'll talk, we'll protect you. If you don't talk, I don't think Stark can treat you much rougher than these men are likely to. Now spill it—what's it all about?"

He lifted desperate eyes.

"You-all got to lemme stay here," he shuddered. "And guard me, and gimme money to git away on when de trouble's over."

"We'll do all that," I agreed instantly. "You can stay right here in this cabin, until you're ready to leave for New Orleans or wherever you want to go."

He capitulated, collapsed, and words tumbled from his livid lips.

"Saul Stark's a conjer man. He come here because it's way off in back-country. He aim to kill all de white folks in Canaan——"

A growl rose from the group, such a growl as rises unbidden from the throat of the wolf-pack that scents peril.

"He aim to make hisself king of Canaan. He sent me to spy dis mornin' to see if Mistah Kirby got through. He sent men to waylay him on de road, cause he knowed Mistah Kirby was comin' back to Canaan. Niggers makin' voodoo on Tularoosa, for weeks now. Ridge Jackson was goin' to tell Cap'n Sorley; so Stark's niggers foller him and kill him. That make Stark mad. He ain't want to *kill* Ridge; he want to put him in de swamp with Tunk Bixby and de others."

"What are you talking about?" I demanded.

Far out in the woods rose a strange, shrill cry, like the cry of a bird. But no such bird ever called before in Canaan. Tope cried out as if in answer, and shriveled into himself. He sank down on the bunk in a veritable palsy of fear.

"That was a signal!" I snapped. "Some of you go out there."

Half a dozen men hastened to follow my suggestion, and I returned to the task of making Tope renew his revelations. It was useless. Some hideous fear had sealed his lips. He lay shuddering like a stricken animal, and did not even seem to hear our questions. No one suggested the use of the blacksnake. Anyone could see the negro was paralyzed with terror.

PRESENTLY the searchers returned, empty-handed. They had seen no one, and the thick carpet of pine needles showed no foot-prints. The men looked at me expectantly. As Colonel Buckner's son, leadership was expected of me.

"What about it, Kirby?" asked McBride. "Breckinridge and the others have just rode in. They couldn't find that nigger you cut up."

"There was another nigger I hit with a pistol," I said. "Maybe he came back and helped him." Still I could not bring

myself to mention the brown girl. "Leave Tope alone. Maybe he'll get over his scare after a while. Better keep a guard in the cabin all the time. The swamp niggers may try to get him as they got Ridge Jackson. Better scour the roads around the town, Esau; there may be some of them hiding in the woods."

"I will. I reckon you'll want to be gettin' up to the house, now, and seein' your folks."

"Yes. And I want to swap these toys for a couple of .44s. Then I'm going to ride out and tell the country people to come into Grimesville. If it's to be an uprising, we don't know when it will commence."

"You're not goin' alone!" protested McBride.

"I'll be all right," I answered impatiently. "All this may not amount to anything, but it's best to be on the safe side. That's why I'm going after the country folks. No, I don't want anybody to go with me. Just in case the niggers do get crazy enough to attack the town, you'll need every man you've got. But if I can get hold of some of the swamp niggers and talk to them, I don't think there'll be any attack."

"You won't get a glimpse of them," McBride predicted.

3. *Shadows Over Canaan*

It was not yet noon when I rode out of the village westward along the old road. Thick woods swallowed me quickly. Dense walls of pines marched with me on either hand, giving way occasionally to fields enclosed with straggling rail fences, with the log cabins of the tenants or owners close by, with the usual litters of tow-headed children and lank hound dogs.

Some of the cabins were empty. The occupants, if white, had already gone into Grimesville; if black they had gone into the swamps, or fled to the hidden refuge of the town niggers, according to their affiliations. In any event, the vacancy of their hovels was sinister in its suggestion.

A tense silence brooded over the pinelands, broken only by the occasional wailing call of a plowman. My progress was not swift, for from time to time I turned off the main road to give warning to some lonely cabin huddled on the bank of one of the many thicket-fringed creeks. Most of these farms were south of the road; the white settlements did not extend far to the north; for in that direction lay Tularoosa Creek with its jungle-grown marshes that stretched inlets southward like groping fingers.

The actual warning was brief; there was no need to argue or explain. I called from the saddle: "Get into town; trouble's brewing on Tularoosa." Faces paled, and people dropped whatever they were doing: the men to grab guns and jerk mules from the plow to hitch to the wagons, the women to bundle necessary belongings together and shrill the children in from their play. As I rode I heard the cow-horns blowing up and down the creeks, summoning men from distant fields—blowing as they had not blown for a generation, a warning and a defiance which I knew carried to such ears as might be listening in the edges of the swamplands. The country emptied itself behind me, flowing in thin but steady streams toward Grimesville.

The sun was swinging low among the topmost branches of the pines when I reached the Richardson cabin, the westernmost "white" cabin in Canaan. Beyond it lay the Neck, the angle formed by the junction of Tularoosa with Black River, a jungle-like expanse occupied only by scattered negro huts.

Mrs. Richardson called to me anxiously from the cabin stoop.

"Well, Mr. Kirby, I'm glad to see you back in Canaan! We been hearin' the horns all evenin', Mr. Kirby. What's it mean? It—it ain't——"

"You and Joe better get the children and light out for Grimesville," I answered. "Nothing's happened yet, and may not, but it's best to be on the safe side. All the people are going."

"We'll go right now!" she gasped, paling, as she snatched off her apron. "Lord, Mr. Kirby, you reckon they'll cut us off before we can git to town?"

I shook my head. "They'll strike at night, if at all. We're just playing safe. Probably nothing will come of it."

"I bet you're wrong there," she predicted, scurrying about in desperate activity. "I been hearin' a drum beatin' off toward Saul Stark's cabin, off and on, for a week now. They beat drums back in the Big Uprisin'. My pappy's told me about it many's the time. The nigger skinned his brother alive. The horns was blowin' all up and down the creeks, and the drums was beatin' louder'n the horns could blow. You'll be ridin' back with us, won't you, Mr. Kirby?"

"No; I'm going to scout down along the trail a piece."

"Don't go too far. You're liable to run into old Saul Stark and his devils. Lord! *Where* is that man? Joe! *Joe!*"

As I rode down the trail her shrill voice followed me, thin-edged with fear.

BEYOND the Richardson farm pines gave way to live-oaks. The underbrush grew ranker. A scent of rotting vegetation impregnated the fitful breeze. Occasionally I sighted a nigger hut, half hidden under the trees, but always it stood silent and deserted. Empty nigger cabins meant but one thing: the blacks were collecting at Goshen, some miles to the east on the Tularoosa; and that gathering, too, could have but one meaning.

My goal was Saul Stark's hut. My intention had been formed when I heard Tope Sorley's incoherent tale. There could be no doubt that Saul Stark was the dominant figure in this web of mystery. With Saul Stark I meant to deal. That I might be risking my life was a chance any man must take who assumes the responsibility of leadership.

The sun slanted through the lower branches of the cypresses when I reached it—a log cabin set against a background of gloomy tropical jungle. A few steps beyond it began the uninhabitable swamp in which Tularoosa emptied its murky current into Black River. A reek of decay hung in the air; gray moss bearded the trees, and poisonous vines twisted in rank tangles.

I called: "Stark! Saul Stark! Come out here!"

There was no answer. A primitive silence hovered over the tiny clearing. I dismounted, tied my horse and approached the crude, heavy door. Perhaps this cabin held a clue to the mystery of Saul Stark; at least it doubtless contained the implements and paraphernalia of his noisome craft. The faint breeze dropped suddenly. The stillness became so intense it was like a physical impact. I paused, startled; it was as if some inner instinct had shouted urgent warning.

As I stood there every fiber of me quivered in response to that subconscious warning; some obscure, deep-hidden instinct sensed peril, as a man senses the presence of the rattlesnake in the darkness, or the swamp panther crouching in the bushes. I drew a pistol, sweeping the trees and bushes, but saw no shadow or movement to betray the ambush I feared. But my instinct was unerring; what I sensed was not lurking in the woods about me; it was inside the

cabin—*waiting*. Trying to shake off the feeling, and irked by a vague half-memory that kept twitching at the back of my brain, I again advanced. And again I stopped short, with one foot on the tiny stoop, and a hand half advanced to pull open the door. A chill shivering swept over me, a sensation like that which shakes a man to whom a flicker of lightning has revealed the black abyss into which another blind step would have hurled him. For the first time in my life I knew the meaning of fear; I knew that black horror lurked in that sullen cabin under the moss-bearded cypresses—a horror against which every primitive instinct that was my heritage cried out in panic.

And that insistent half-memory woke suddenly. It was the memory of a story of how voodoo men leave their huts guarded in their absence by a powerful ju-ju spirit to deal madness and death to the intruder. White men ascribed such deaths to superstitious fright and hypnotic suggestion. But in that instant I understood my sense of lurking peril; I comprehended the horror that breathed like an invisible mist from that accursed hut. I sensed the reality of the ju-ju, of which the grotesque wooden images which voodoo men place in their huts are only a symbol.

Saul Stark was gone; but he had left a Presence to guard his hut.

I backed away, sweat beading the backs of my hands. Not for a bag of gold would I have peered into the shuttered windows or touched that unbolted door. My pistol hung in my hand, useless I knew against the *Thing* in that cabin. What it was I could not know, but I knew it was some brutish, soulless entity drawn from the black swamps by the spells of voodoo. Man and the natural animals are not the only sentient beings that haunt this planet. There are invisible *Things*—black spirits of the deep swamps and the slimes of the river beds—the negroes know of them. . . .

My horse was trembling like a leaf and he shouldered close to me as if seeking security in bodily contact. I mounted and reined away, fighting a panicky urge to strike in the spurs and bolt madly down the trail.

I breathed an involuntary sigh of relief as the somber clearing fell away behind me and was lost from sight. I did not, as soon as I was out of sight of the cabin, revile myself for a silly fool. My experience was too vivid in my mind. It was not cowardice that prompted my retreat from that empty hut; it was the natural instinct of self-preservation, such as keeps a squirrel from entering the lair of a rattlesnake.

My horse snorted and shied violently. A gun was in my hand before I saw what had startled me. Again a rich musical laugh taunted me.

She was leaning against a bent tree-trunk, her hands clasped behind her sleek head, insolently posing her sensuous figure. The barbaric fascination of her was not dispelled by daylight; if anything, the glow of the low-hanging sun enhanced it.

"Why did you not go into the ju-ju cabin, Kirby Buckner?" she mocked, lowering her arms and moving insolently out from the tree.

She was clad as I had never seen a swamp woman, or any other woman, dressed. Snakeskin sandals were on her feet, sewn with tiny sea-shells that were never gathered on this continent. A short silken skirt of flaming crimson molded her full hips, and was upheld by a broad bead-worked girdle. Barbaric anklets and armlets clashed as she moved, heavy ornaments of crudely hammered gold that were as African as her loftily piled coiffure. Nothing else she wore,

and on her bosom, between her arching breasts, I glimpsed the faint lines of tattooing on her brown skin.

She posed derisively before me, not in allure, but in mockery. Triumphant malice blazed in her dark eyes; her red lips curled with cruel mirth. Looking at her then I found it easy to believe all the tales I had heard of torture and mutilations inflicted by the women of savage races on wounded enemies. She was alien, even in this primitive setting; she needed a grimmer, more bestial background, a background of steaming jungle, reeking black swamps, flaring fires and cannibal feasts, and the bloody altars of abysmal tribal gods.

"Kirby Buckner!" She seemed to caress the syllables with her red tongue, yet the very intonation was an obscene insult. "Why did you not enter Saul Stark's cabin? It was not locked! Did you fear what you might see there? Did you fear you might come out with your hair white like an old man's, and the drooling lips of an imbecile?"

"What's in that hut?" I demanded.

She laughed in my face, and snapped her fingers with a peculiar gesture.

"One of the ones which come oozing like black mist out of the night when Saul Stark beats the ju-ju drum and shrieks the black incantation to the gods that crawl on their bellies in the swamp."

"What is he doing here? The black folk were quiet until he came."

Her red lips curled disdainfully. "Those black dogs? They are his slaves. If they disobey he kills them, *or puts them in the swamp.* For long we have looked for a place to begin our rule. We have chosen Canaan. You whites must go. And since we know that white people can never be driven away from their land, we must kill you all."

It was my turn to laugh, grimly.

"They tried that, back in '45."

"They did not have Saul Stark to lead them, then," she answered calmly.

"Well, suppose they won? Do you think that would be the end of it? Other white men would come into Canaan and kill them all."

"They would have to cross water," she answered. "We can defend the rivers and creeks. Saul Stark will have many *servants in the swamps* to do his bidding. He will be king of black Canaan. No one can cross the waters to come against him. He will rule his tribe, as his fathers ruled their tribes in the Ancient Land."

"Mad as a loon!" I muttered. Then curiosity impelled me to ask: "Who is this fool? What are you to him?"

"He is the son of a Kongo witch-finder, and he is the greatest voodoo priest out of the Ancient Land," she answered, laughing at me again. "I? You shall learn who *I* am, tonight in the swamp, in the House of Damballah."

"Yes?" I grunted. "What's to prevent me from taking you into Grimesville with me? You know the answers to questions I'd like to ask."

Her laughter was like the slash of a velvet whip.

"*You* drag me to the village of the whites? Not all death and hell could keep me from the Dance of the Skull, tonight in the House of Damballah. You are *my* captive, already." She laughed derisively as I started and glared into the shadows about me. "No one is hiding there. I am alone, and you are the strongest man in Canaan. Even Saul Stark fears you, for he sent me with three men to kill you before you could reach the village. Yet you are my captive. I have but to beckon, so"—she crooked a contemptuous finger—"and you will follow to the fires of Damballah and the knives of the torturers."

I laughed at her, but my mirth rang

hollow. I could not deny the incredible magnetism of this brown enchantress; it fascinated and impelled, drawing me toward her, beating at my will-power. I could not fail to recognize it any more than I could fail to recognize the peril in the ju-ju hut.

MY AGITATION was apparent to her, for her eyes flashed with unholy triumph.

"Black men are fools, all but Saul Stark," she laughed. "White men are fools, too. I am the daughter of a white man, who lived in the hut of a black king and mated with his daughters. I know the strength of white men, and their weakness. I failed last night when I met you in the woods, but now I cannot fail!" Savage exultation thrummed in her voice. "By the blood in your veins I have snared you. The knife of the man you killed scratched your hand—seven drops of blood that fell on the pine needles have given me your soul! I took that blood, and Saul Stark gave me the man who ran away. Saul Stark hates cowards. With his hot, quivering heart, and seven drops of your blood, Kirby Buckner, deep in the swamps I have made such magic as none but a Bride of Damballah can make. Already you feel its urge! Oh, you are strong! The man you fought with the knife died less than an hour later. But you cannot fight me. Your blood makes you my slave. I have put a conjurement upon you."

By heaven, it was not mere madness she was mouthing! Hypnotism, magic, call it what you will, I felt its onslaught on my brain and will—a blind, senseless impulse that seemed to be rushing me against my will to the brink of some nameless abyss.

"I have made a charm you cannot resist!" she cried. "When I call you, you will come! Into the deep swamps you will follow me. You will see the Dance of the Skull, and you will see the doom of a poor fool who sought to betray Saul Stark—who dreamed he could resist the Call of Damballah when it came. Into the swamp he goes tonight, with Tunk Bixby and the other four fools who opposed Saul Stark. You shall see that. You shall know and understand your own doom. And then you too shall go into the swamp, into darkness and silence deep as the darkness of nighted Africa! But before the darkness engulfs you there will be sharp knives, and little fires—oh, you will scream for death, even for the death that is beyond death!"

With a choking cry I whipped out a pistol and leveled it full at her breast. It was cocked and my finger was on the trigger. At that range I could not miss. But she looked full into the black muzzle and laughed—laughed—laughed, in wild peals that froze the blood in my veins.

And I sat there like an image pointing a pistol I could not fire! A frightful paralysis gripped me. I knew, with numbing certainty, that my life depended on the pull of that trigger, but I could not crook my finger—not though every muscle in my body quivered with the effort and sweat broke out on my face in clammy beads.

She ceased laughing, then, and stood looking at me in a manner indescribably sinister.

"You cannot shoot me, Kirby Buckner," she said quietly. "I have enslaved your soul. You cannot understand my power, but it has ensnared you. It is the Lure of the Bride of Damballah—the blood I have mixed with the mystic waters of Africa drawing the blood in your veins. Tonight you will come to me, in the House of Damballah."

"You lie!" My voice was an unnatural croak bursting from dry lips. "You've hypnotized me, you she-devil, so I can't

pull this trigger. But you can't drag me across the swamps to you."

"It is you who lie," she returned calmly. "You know you lie. Ride back toward Grimesville or wherever you will, Kirby Buckner. But when the sun sets and the black shadows crawl out of the swamps, you will see me beckoning you, and you will follow me. Long I have planned your doom, Kirby Buckner, since first I heard the white men of Canaan talking of you. It was I who sent the word down the river that brought you back to Canaan. Not even Saul Stark knows of my plans for you.

"At dawn Grimesville shall go up in flames, and the heads of the white men will be tossed in the blood-running streets. But tonight is the Night of Damballah, and a white sacrifice shall be given to the black gods. Hidden among the trees you shall watch the Dance of the Skull—and then I shall call you forth—to die! And now, go, fool! Run as far and as fast as you will. At sunset, wherever you are, you will turn your footsteps toward the House of Damballah!"

And with the spring of a panther she was gone into the thick brush, and as she vanished the strange paralysis dropped from me. With a gasped oath I fired blindly after her, but only a mocking laugh floated back to me.

Then in a panic I wrenched my horse about and spurred him down the trail. Reason and logic had momentarily vanished from my brain, leaving me in the grasp of blind, primitive fear. I had confronted sorcery beyond my power to resist. I had felt my will mastered by the mesmerism in a brown woman's eyes. And now one driving urge overwhelmed me—a wild desire to cover as much distance as I could before that low-hanging sun dipped below the horizon and the black shadows came crawling from the swamps.

And yet I knew I could not outrun the grisly specter that menaced me. I was like a man fleeing in a nightmare, trying to escape from a monstrous phantom which kept pace with me despite my desperate speed.

I HAD not reached the Richardson cabin when above the drumming of my flight I heard the clop of hoofs ahead of me, and an instant later, sweeping around a kink in the trail, I almost rode down a tall, lanky man on an equally gaunt horse.

He yelped and dodged back as I jerked my horse to its haunches, my pistol presented at his breast.

"Look out, Kirby! It's me—Jim Braxton! My God, you look like you'd seen a ghost! What's chasin' you?"

"Where are you going?" I demanded, lowering my gun.

"Lookin' for you. Folks got worried as it got late and you didn't come in with the refugees. I 'lowed I'd light out and look for you. Miz Richardson said you rode into the Neck. Where in tarnation you been?"

"To Saul Stark's cabin."

"You takin' a big chance. What'd you find there?"

The sight of another white man had somewhat steadied my nerves. I opened my mouth to narrate my adventure, and was shocked to hear myself saying, instead: "Nothing. He wasn't there."

"Thought I heard a gun crack, a while ago," he remarked, glancing sharply at me, sidewise.

"I shot at a copperhead," I answered, and shuddered. This reticence regarding the brown woman was compulsory; I could no more speak of her than I could pull the trigger of the pistol aimed at her. And I cannot describe the horror that beset me when I realized this. The conjer

spells the black men feared were not lies, I realized sickly; demons in human form *did* exist who were able to enslave men's will and thoughts.

Braxton was eyeing me strangely.

"We're lucky the woods ain't full of black copperheads," he said. "Tope Sorley's pulled out."

"What do you mean?" By an effort I pulled myself together.

"Just that. Tom Breckinridge was in the cabin with him. Tope hadn't said a word since you talked to him. Just laid on that bunk and shivered. Then a kind of holler begun way out in the woods, and Tom went to the door with his rifle-gun, but couldn't see nothin'. Well, while he was standin' there he got a lick on the head from *behind,* and as he fell he seen that crazy nigger Tope jump over him and light out for the woods. Tom he taken a shot at him, but missed. Now what you make of that?"

"The Call of Damballah!" I muttered, a chill perspiration beading my body. "God! The poor devil!"

"Huh? What's that?"

"For God's sake let's not stand here mouthing! The sun will soon be down!" In a frenzy of impatience I kicked my mount down the trail. Braxton followed me, obviously puzzled. With a terrific effort I got a grip on myself. How madly fantastic it was that Kirby Buckner should be shaking in the grip of unreasoning terror! It was so alien to my whole nature that it was no wonder Jim Braxton was unable to comprehend what ailed me.

"Tope didn't go of his own free will," I said. "That call was a summons he couldn't resist. Hypnotism, black magic, voodoo, whatever you want to call it, Saul Stark has some damnable power that enslaves men's will-power. The blacks are gathered somewhere in the swamp, for some kind of a devilish voodoo ceremony, which I have reason to believe will culminate in the murder of Tope Sorley. We've got to get to Grimesville if we can. I expect an attack at dawn."

Braxton was pale in the dimming light. He did not ask me where I got my knowledge.

"We'll lick 'em when they come; but it'll be a slaughter."

I did not reply. My eyes were fixed with savage intensity on the sinking sun, and as it slid out of sight behind the trees I was shaken with an icy tremor. In vain I told myself that no occult power could draw me against my will. If she had been able to compel me, why had she not forced me to accompany her from the glade of the ju-ju hut? A grisly whisper seemed to tell me that she was but playing with me, as a cat allows a mouse almost to escape, only to be pounced upon again.

"Kirby, what's the matter with you?" I scarcely heard Braxton's anxious voice. "You're sweatin' and shakin' like you had the aggers. What—hey, what you stoppin' for?"

I had not consciously pulled on the rein, but my horse halted, and stood trembling and snorting, before the mouth of a narrow trail which meandered away at right angles from the road we were following—a trail that led north.

"Listen!" I hissed tensely.

"What is it?" Braxton drew a pistol. The brief twilight of the pinelands was deepening into dusk.

"Don't you hear it?" I muttered. "Drums! Drums beating in Goshen!"

"I don't hear nothin'," he mumbled uneasily. "If they was beatin' drums in Goshen you couldn't hear 'em this far away."

"Look there!" My sharp sudden cry made him start. I was pointing down the dim trail, at the figure which stood there in the dusk less than a hundred yards away. There in the dusk I saw her, even made out the gleam of her strange eyes,

the mocking smile on her red lips. "Saul Stark's brown wench!" I raved, tearing at my scabbard. "My God, man, are you stone-blind? Don't you see her?"

"I don't see nobody!" he whispered, livid. "What are you talkin' about, Kirby?"

With eyes glaring I fired down the trail, and fired again, and yet again. This time no paralysis gripped my arm. But the smiling face still mocked me from the shadows. A slender, rounded arm lifted, a finger beckoned imperiously; and then she was gone and I was spurring my horse down the narrow trail, blind, deaf and dumb, with a sensation as of being caught in a black tide that was carrying me with it as it rushed on to a destination beyond my comprehension.

Dimly I heard Braxton's urgent yells, and then he drew up beside me with a clatter of hoofs, and grabbed my reins, setting my horse back on its haunches. I remember striking at him with my gun-barrel, without realizing what I was doing. All the black rivers of Africa were surging and foaming within my consciousness, roaring into a torrent that was sweeping me down to engulf me in an ocean of doom.

"Kirby, are you crazy? This trail leads to Goshen!"

I shook my head dazedly. The foam of the rushing waters swirled in my brain, and my voice sounded far away. "Go back! Ride for Grimesville! I'm going to Goshen."

"Kirby, you're mad!"

"Mad or sane, I'm going to Goshen this night," I answered dully. I was fully conscious. I knew what I was saying, and what I was doing. I realized the incredible folly of my action, and I realized my inability to help myself. Some shred of sanity impelled me to try to conceal the grisly truth from my companion, to offer a rational reason for my madness. "Saul Stark is in Goshen. He's the one who's responsible for all this trouble. I'm going to kill him. That will stop the uprising before it starts."

He was trembling like a man with the ague.

"Then I'm goin' with you."

"You must go on to Grimesville and warn the people," I insisted, holding to sanity, but feeling a strong urge begin to seize me, an irresistible urge to be in motion—to be riding in the direction toward which I was so horribly drawn.

"They'll be on their guard," he said stubbornly. "They won't need my warnin'. I'm goin' with you. I don't know what's got in you, but I ain't goin' to let you die alone among these black woods."

I did not argue. I could not. The blind rivers were sweeping me on—on—on! And down the trail, dim in the dusk, I glimpsed a supple figure, caught the gleam of uncanny eyes, the crook of a lifted finger. . . . Then I was in motion, galloping down the trail, and I heard the drum of Braxton's horse's hoofs behind me.

4. The Dwellers in the Swamp

NIGHT fell and the moon shone through the trees, blood-red behind the black branches. The horses were growing hard to manage.

"They got more sense'n us, Kirby," muttered Braxton.

"Panther, maybe," I replied absently, my eyes searching the gloom of the trail ahead.

"Naw, t'ain't. Closer we git to Goshen, the worse they git. And every time we swing nigh to a creek they shy and snort."

The trail had not yet crossed any of the narrow, muddy creeks that criss-crossed that end of Canaan, but several times it had swung so close to one of

them that we glimpsed the black streak that was water glinting dully in the shadows of the thick growth. And each time, I remembered, the horses showed signs of fear.

But I had hardly noticed, wrestling as I was with the grisly compulsion that was driving me. Remember, I was not like a man in a hypnotic trance. I was fully awake, fully conscious. Even the daze in which I had seemed to hear the roar of black rivers had passed, leaving my mind clear, my thoughts lucid. And that was the sweating hell of it: to realize my folly clearly and poignantly, but to be unable to conquer it. Vividly I realized that I was riding to torture and death, and leading a faithful friend to the same end. But on I went. My efforts to break the spell that gripped me almost unseated my reason, but on I went. I cannot explain my compulsion, any more than I can explain why a sliver of steel is drawn to a magnet. It was a black power beyond the ring of white man's knowledge; a basic, elemental thing of which formal hypnotism is but scanty crumbs, spilled at random. A power beyond my control was drawing me to Goshen, and beyond; more I cannot explain, any more than the rabbit could explain why the eyes of the swaying serpent draw him into its gaping jaws.

We were not far from Goshen when Braxton's horse unseated its rider, and my own began snorting and plunging.

"They won't go no closer!" gasped Braxton, fighting at the reins.

I swung off, threw the reins over the saddle-horn.

"Go back, for God's sake, Jim! I'm going on afoot."

I heard him whimper an oath, then his horse was galloping after mine, and he was following me on foot. The thought that he must share my doom sickened me, but I could not dissuade him; and ahead of me a supple form was dancing in the shadows, luring me on—on—on. . . .

I wasted no more bullets on that mocking shape. Braxton could not see it, and I knew it was part of my enchantment, no real woman of flesh and blood, but a hell-born will-o'-the-wisp, mocking me and leading me through the night to a hideous death. A "sending," the people of the Orient, who are wiser than we, call such a thing.

BRAXTON peered nervously at the black forest walls about us, and I knew his flesh was crawling with the fear of sawed-off shotguns blasting us suddenly from the shadows. But it was no ambush of lead or steel I feared as we emerged into the moonlit clearing that housed the cabins of Goshen.

The double line of log cabins faced each other across the dusty street. One line backed against the bank of Tularoosa Creek. The back stoops almost overhung the black waters. Nothing moved in the moonlight. No lights showed, no smoke oozed up from the stick-and-mud chimneys. It might have been a dead town, deserted and forgotten.

"It's a trap!" hissed Braxton, his eyes blazing slits. He bent forward like a skulking panther, a gun in each hand. "They're layin' for us in them huts!"

Then he cursed, but followed me as I strode down the street. I did not hail the silent huts. I *knew* Goshen was deserted. I felt its emptiness. Yet there was a contradictory sensation as of spying eyes fixed upon us. I did not try to reconcile these opposite convictions.

"They're gone," muttered Braxton, nervously. "I can't smell 'em. I can always smell niggers, if they're a lot of 'em, or if they're right close. You reckon they've already gone to raid Grimesville?"

"No," I muttered. "They're in the House of Damballah."

He shot a quick glance at me.

"That's a neck of land in the Tularoosa about three miles west of here. My grandpap used to talk about it. The niggers held their heathen palavers there back in slave times. You ain't—Kirby—you——"

"Listen!" I wiped the icy sweat from my face. *"Listen!"*

Through the black woodlands the faint throb of a drum whispered on the wind that glided up the shadowy reaches of the Tularoosa.

Braxton shivered. "It's them, all right. But for God's sake, Kirby—*look out!*"

With an oath he sprang toward the houses on the bank of the creek. I was after him just in time to glimpse a dark clumsy object scrambling or tumbling down the sloping bank into the water. Braxton threw up his long pistol, then lowered it, with a baffled curse. A faint splash marked the disappearance of the creature. The shiny black surface crinkled with spreading ripples.

"What was it?" I demanded.

"A nigger on his all-fours!" swore Braxton. His face was strangely pallid in the moonlight. "He was crouched between them cabins there, watchin' us!"

"It must have been an alligator." What a mystery is the human mind! I was arguing for sanity and logic, I, the blind victim of a compulsion beyond sanity and logic. "A nigger would have to come up for air."

"He swum under the water and come up in the shadder of the bresh where we couldn't see him," maintained Braxton. "Now he'll go warn Saul Stark."

"Never mind!" The pulse was thrumming in my temples again, the roar of foaming waters rising irresistibly in my brain. "I'm going—straight through the swamp. For the last time, go back!"

"No! Sane or mad, I'm goin' with you!"

The pulse of the drum was fitful, growing more distinct as we advanced. We struggled through jungle-thick growth; tangled vines tripped us; our boots sank in scummy mire. We were entering the fringe of the swamp which grew deeper and denser until it culminated in the uninhabitable morass where the Tularoosa flowed into Black River, miles farther to the west.

The moon had not yet set, but the shadows were black under the interlacing branches with their mossy beards. We plunged into the first creek we must cross, one of the many muddy streams flowing into the Tularoosa. The water was only thigh-deep, the moss-clogged bottom fairly firm. My foot felt the edge of a sheer drop, and I warned Braxton: "Look out for a deep hole; keep right behind me."

His answer was unintelligible. He was breathing heavily, crowding close behind me. Just as I reached the sloping bank and pulled myself up by the slimy, projecting roots, the water was violently agitated behind me. Braxton cried out incoherently, and hurled himself up the bank, almost upsetting me. I wheeled, gun in hand, but saw only the black water seething and whirling, after his thrashing rush through it.

"What the devil, Jim?"

"Somethin' grabbed me!" he panted. "Somethin' out of the deep hole. I tore loose and busted up the bank. I tell you, Kirby, somethin's follerin' us! Somethin' that swims under the water."

"Maybe it was that nigger you saw. These swamp people swim like fish. Maybe he swam up under the water to try to drown you."

He shook his head, staring at the black water, gun in hand.

"It *smelt* like a nigger, and the little I saw of it *looked* like a nigger. But it didn't *feel* like any kind of a human."

"Well, it was an alligator then," I mut-

tered absently as I turned away. As always when I halted, even for a moment, the roar of peremptory and imperious rivers shook the foundations of my reason.

He splashed after me without comment. Scummy puddles rose about our ankles, and we stumbled over moss-grown cypress knees. Ahead of us there loomed another, wider creek, and Braxton caught my arm.

"Don't do it, Kirby!" he gasped. "If we go into that water, it'll git us sure!"

"What?"

"I don't know. Whatever it was that flopped down that bank back there in Goshen. The same thing that grabbed me in that creek back yonder. Kirby, let's go back."

"Go back?" I laughed in bitter agony. "I wish to God I could! I've got to go on. Either Saul Stark or I must die before dawn."

He licked dry lips and whispered. "Go on, then; I'm with you, come heaven or hell." He thrust his pistol back into its scabbard, and drew a long keen knife from his boot. "Go ahead!"

I climbed down the sloping bank and splashed into the water that rose to my hips. The cypress branches bent a gloomy, moss-trailing arch over the creek. The water was black as midnight. Braxton was a blur, toiling behind me. I gained the first shelf of the opposite bank and paused, in water knee-deep, to turn and look back at him.

Everything happened at once, then. I saw Braxton halt short, staring at something on the bank behind me. He cried out, whipped out a gun and fired, just as I turned. In the flash of the gun I glimpsed a supple form reeling backward, a brown face fiendishly contorted. Then in the momentary blindness that followed the flash, I heard Jim Braxton scream.

Sight and brain cleared in time to show me a sudden swirl of the murky water, a round, black object breaking the surface behind Jim—and then Braxton gave a strangled cry and went under with a frantic thrashing and splashing. With an incoherent yell I sprang into the creek, stumbled and went to my knees, almost submerging myself. As I struggled up I saw Braxton's head, now streaming blood, break the surface for an instant, and I lunged toward it. It went under and another head appeared in its place, a shadowy black head. I stabbed at it ferociously, and my knife cut only the blank water as the thing dipped out of sight.

I staggered from the wasted force of the blow, and when I righted myself, the water lay unbroken about me. I called Jim's name, but there was no answer. Then panic laid a cold hand on me, and I splashed to the bank, sweating and trembling. With the water no higher than my knees I halted and waited, for I knew not what. But presently, down the creek a short distance, I made out a vague object lying in the shallow water near the shore.

I waded to it, through the clinging mud and crawling vines. It was Jim Braxton, and he was dead. It was not the wound in his head which had killed him. Probably he had struck a submerged rock when he was dragged under. But the marks of strangling fingers showed black on his throat. At the sight a nameless horror oozed out of that black swamp water and coiled itself clammily about my soul; for no human fingers ever left such marks as those.

I had seen a head rise in the water, a head that looked like that of a negro, though the features had been indistinct in the darkness. But no man, white or black, ever possessed the fingers that had crushed the life out of Jim Braxton. The distant drum grunted as if in mockery.

I DRAGGED the body up on the bank and left it. I could not linger longer, for the madness was foaming in my brain again, driving me with white-hot spurs. But as I climbed the bank, I found blood on the bushes, and was shaken by the implication.

I remembered the figure I had seen staggering in the flash of Braxton's gun. *She* had been there, waiting for me on the bank, then—not a spectral illusion, but the woman herself, in flesh and blood! Braxton had fired at her, and wounded her. But the wound could not have been mortal; for no corpse lay among the bushes, and the grim hypnosis that dragged me onward was unweakened. Dizzily I wondered if she could be killed by mortal weapons.

The moon had set. The starlight scarcely penetrated the interwoven branches. No more creeks barred my way, only shallow streams, through which I splashed with sweating haste. Yet I did not expect to be attacked. Twice the dweller in the depths had passed me by to attack my companion. In icy despair I knew I was being saved for a grimmer fate. Each stream I crossed might be hiding the monster that killed Jim Braxton. Those creeks were all connected in a network of winding waterways. It could follow me easily. But my horror of it was less than the horror of the jungle-born magnetism that lurked in a witch-woman's eyes.

And as I stumbled through the tangled vegetation, I heard the drum rumbling ahead of me, louder and louder, in demoniacal mockery. Then a human voice mingled with its mutter, in a long-drawn cry of horror and agony that set every fiber of me quivering with sympathy. Sweat coursed down my clammy flesh; soon my own voice might be lifted like that, under unnamable torture. But on I went, my feet moving like automatons, apart from my body, motivated by a will not my own.

The drum grew loud, and a fire glowed among the black trees. Presently, crouching among the bushes, I stared across the stretch of black water that separated me from a nightmare scene. My halting there was as compulsory as the rest of my actions had been. Vaguely I knew the stage for horror had been set, but the time for my entry upon it was not yet. When the time had come, I would receive my summons.

A low, wooded island split the black creek, connected with the shore opposite me by a narrow neck of land. At its lower end the creek split into a network of channels threading their way among hummocks and rotting logs and moss-grown, vine-tangled clumps of trees. Directly across from my refuge the shore of the island was deeply indented by an arm of open, deep black water. Bearded trees walled a small clearing, and partly hid a hut. Between the hut and the shore burned a fire that sent up weird twisting snake-tongues of green flames. Scores of black people squatted under the shadows of the overhanging branches. When the green fire lit their faces it lent them the appearance of drowned corpses.

In the midst of the glade stood a giant negro, an awesome statue in black marble. He was clad in ragged trousers, but on his head was a band of beaten gold set with a huge red jewel, and on his feet were barbaric sandals. His features reflected titanic vitality no less than his huge body. But he was all negro—flaring nostrils, thick lips, ebony skin. I knew I looked upon Saul Stark, the conjure man.

He was regarding something that lay in the sand before him, something dark and bulky that moaned feebly. Presently, lifting his head, he rolled out a sonorous invocation across the black waters. From

the blacks huddled under the trees there came a shuddering response, like a wind wailing through midnight branches. Both invocation and response were framed in an unknown tongue—a guttural, primitive language.

Again he called out, this time a curious high-pitched wail. A shuddering sigh swept the black people. All eyes were fixed on the dusky water. And presently an object rose slowly from the depths. A sudden trembling shook me. It looked like the head of a negro. One after another it was followed by similar objects until five heads reared above the black, cypress-shadowed water. They might have been five negroes submerged except for their heads—but I knew this was not so. There was something diabolical here. Their silence, motionlessness, their whole aspect was unnatural. From the trees came the hysterical sobbing of women, and someone whimpered a man's name.

Then Saul Stark lifted his hands, and the five heads silently sank out of sight. Like a ghostly whisper I seemed to hear the voice of the African witch: *"He puts them in the swamp!"*

Stark's deep voice rolled out across the narrow water: "And now the Dance of the Skull, to make the conjer sure!"

What had the witch said? *"Hidden among the trees you shall watch the dance of the Skull!"*

THE drum struck up again, growling and rumbling. The blacks swayed on their haunches, lifting a wordless chant. Saul Stark paced measuredly about the figure on the sand, his arms weaving cryptic patterns. Then he wheeled and faced toward the other end of the glade. By some sleight of hand he now grasped a grinning human skull, and this he cast upon the wet sand beyond the body. "Bride of Damballah!" he thundered. "The sacrifice awaits!"

There was an expectant pause; the chanting sank. All eyes were glued on the farther end of the glade. Stark stood waiting, and I saw him scowl as if puzzled. Then as he opened his mouth to repeat the call, a barbaric figure moved out of the shadows.

At the sight of her a chill shuddering shook me. For a moment she stood motionless, the firelight glinting on her gold ornaments, her head hanging on her breast. A tense silence reigned and I saw Saul Stark staring at her sharply. She seemed to be detached, somehow, standing aloof and withdrawn, head bent strangely.

Then, as if rousing herself, she began to sway with a jerky rhythm, and presently whirled into the mazes of a dance that was ancient when the ocean drowned the black kings of Atlantis. I cannot describe it. It was bestiality and diabolism set to motion, framed in a writhing, spinning whirl of posturing and gesturing that would have appalled a dancer of the Pharaohs. And that cursed skull danced with her; rattling and clashing on the sand, it bounded and spun like a live thing in time with her leaps and prancings.

But there was something amiss. I sensed it. Her arms hung limp, her drooping head swayed. Her legs bent and faltered, making her lurch drunkenly and out of time. A murmur rose from the people, and bewilderment etched Saul Stark's black countenance. For the domination of a conjure man is a thing hinged on a hair-trigger. Any trifling dislocation of formula or ritual may disrupt the whole web of his enchantment.

As for me, I felt the perspiration freeze on my flesh as I watched the grisly dance. The unseen shackles that bound me to that gyrating she-devil were strangling, crushing me. I knew she was approaching a climax, when she would summon

me from my hiding-place, to wade through the black waters to the House of Damballah, to my doom.

Now she whirled to a floating stop, and when she halted, poised on her toes, she faced toward the spot where I lay hidden, and I knew that she could see me as plainly as if I stood in the open; knew, too, somehow, that only she knew of my presence. I felt myself toppling on the edge of the abyss. She raised her head and I saw the flame of her eyes, even at that distance. Her face was lit with awful triumph. Slowly she raised her hand, and I felt my limbs begin to jerk in response to that terrible magnetism. She opened her mouth——

But from that open mouth sounded only a choking gurgle, and suddenly her lips were dyed crimson. And suddenly, without warning, her knees gave way and she pitched headlong into the sands.

And as she fell, so I too fell, sinking into the mire. Something burst in my brain with a shower of flame. And then I was crouching among the trees, weak and trembling, but with such a sense of freedom and lightness of limb as I never dreamed a man could experience. The black spell that gripped me was broken; the foul incubus lifted from my soul. It was as if light had burst upon a night blacker than African midnight.

At the fall of the girl a wild cry arose from the blacks, and they sprang up, trembling on the verge of panic. I saw their rolling white eyeballs, their bared teeth glistening in the firelight. Saul Stark had worked their primitive natures up to a pitch of madness, meaning to turn this frenzy, at the proper time, into a fury of battle. It could as easily turn into an hysteria of terror. Stark shouted sharply at them.

But just then the girl in a last convulsion, rolled over on the wet sand, and the firelight shone on a round hole between her breasts, which still oozed crimson. Jim Braxton's bullet had found its mark.

From the first I had felt that she was not wholly human; some black jungle spirit sired her, lending her the abysmal subhuman vitality that made her what she was. She had said that neither death nor hell could keep her from the Dance of the Skull. And, shot through the heart and dying, she had come through the swamp from the creek where she had received her death-wound to the House of Damballah. And the Dance of the Skull had been her death dance.

Dazed as a condemned man just granted a reprieve, at first I hardly grasped the meaning of the scene that now unfolded before me.

The blacks were in a frenzy. In the sudden, and to them inexplicable, death of the sorceress they saw a fearsome portent. They had no way of knowing that she was dying when she entered the glade. To them, their prophetess and priestess had been struck down under their very eyes, by an invisible death. This was magic blacker than Saul Stark's wizardry—and obviously hostile to them.

Like fear-maddened cattle they stampeded. Howling, screaming, tearing at one another they blundered through the trees, heading for the neck of land and the shore beyond. Saul Stark stood transfixed, heedless of them as he stared down at the brown girl, dead at last. And suddenly I came to myself, and with my awakened manhood came cold fury and the lust to kill. I drew a gun, and aiming in the uncertain firelight, pulled the trigger. Only a click answered me. The powder in the cap-and-ball pistols was wet.

Saul Stark lifted his head and licked his lips. The sounds of flight faded in the distance, and he stood alone in the glade. His eyes rolled whitely toward the

black woods around him. He bent, grasped the man-like object that lay on the sand, and dragged it into the hut. The instant he vanished I started toward the island, wading through the narrow channels at the lower end. I had almost reached the shore when a mass of driftwood gave way with me and I slid into a deep hole.

Instantly the water swirled about me, and a head rose beside me; a dim face was close to mine—the face of a negro—*the face of Tunk Bixby.* But now it was inhuman; as expressionless and soulless as that of a catfish; the face of a being no longer human, and no longer mindful of its human origin.

Slimy, misshapen fingers gripped my throat, and I drove my knife into that sagging mouth. The features vanished in a wave of blood; mutely the thing sank out of sight, and I hauled myself up the bank, under the thick bushes.

Stark had run from his hut, a pistol in his hand. He was staring wildly about, alarmed by the noise he had heard, but I knew he could not see me. His ashy skin glistened with perspiration. He who had ruled by fear was now ruled by fear. He feared the unknown hand that had slain his mistress; feared the negroes who had fled from him; feared the abysmal swamp which had sheltered him, and the monstrosities he had created. He lifted a weird call that quavered with panic. He called again as only four heads broke the water, but he called in vain.

But the four heads began to move toward the shore and the man who stood there. He shot them one after another. They made no effort to avoid the bullets. They came straight on, sinking one by one. He had fired six shots before the last head vanished. The shots drowned the sounds of my approach. I was close behind him when he turned at last.

I KNOW he knew me; recognition flooded his face and fear went with it, at the knowledge that he had a human being to deal with. With a scream he hurled his empty pistol at me and rushed after it with a lifted knife.

I ducked, parried his lunge and countered with a thrust that bit deep into his ribs. He caught my wrist and I gripped his, and there we strained, breast to breast. His eyes were like a mad dog's in the starlight, his muscles like steel cords.

I ground my heel down on his bare foot, crushing the instep. He howled and lost balance, and I tore my knife hand free and stabbed him in the belly. Blood spurted and he dragged me down with him. I jerked loose and rose, just as he pulled himself up on his elbow and hurled his knife. It sang past my ear, and I stamped on his breast. His ribs caved in under my heel. In a red killing-haze I knelt, jerked back his head and cut his throat from ear to ear.

There was a pouch of dry powder in his belt. Before I moved further I reloaded my pistols. Then I went into the hut with a torch. And there I understood the doom the brown witch had meant for me. Tope Sorley lay moaning on a bunk. The transmutation that was to make him a mindless, soulless semi-human dweller in the water was not complete, but his mind was gone. Some of the physical changes had been made—by what godless sorcery out of Africa's black abyss I have no wish to know. His body was rounded and elongated, his legs dwarfed; his feet were flattened and broadened, his fingers horribly long, and *webbed.* His neck was inches longer than it should be. His features were not altered, but the expression was no more human than that of a great fish. And there, but for the loyalty of Jim Brax-

ton, lay Kirby Buckner. I placed my pistol muzzle against Tope's head in grim mercy and pulled the trigger.

And so the nightmare closed, and I would not drag out the grisly narration. The white people of Canaan never found anything on the island except the bodies of Saul Stark and the brown woman. They think to this day that a swamp negro killed Jim Braxton, after he had killed the brown woman, and that I broke up the threatened uprising by killing Saul Stark. I let them think it. They will never know the shapes the black water of Tularoosa hides. That is a secret I share with the cowed and terror-haunted black people of Goshen, and of it neither they nor I have ever spoken.

The House of the Evil Eye

By HUGH DAVIDSON

A strange story of a family whose mere glance caused those upon whom it fell to sicken and die

"DOCTOR DALE, I came to you because I was told that you were the one person who could help me."

"Just why do you need my help, Mr. Carlin?"

"I need it because I fear that my son is being killed by the evil eye!"

Our caller, who had given his name as Henry Carlin of Tauriston, Massachusetts, leaned tensely toward Doctor Dale. He was a man late in middle age, with thinning gray hair, expressive features, and intelligent blue eyes. Only the expensiveness of his quiet dress bespoke the rich man in Henry Carlin's appearance.

Doctor John Dale was something of a contrast to Carlin. Doctor Dale is over forty but his trim, well-knit figure, his close brown hair and short brown vandyke beard and his clean skin and clear hazel eyes make him seem but a few years older than myself. Doctor Dale sat at his desk while I, Harley Owen, his assistant, occupied a chair in the corner.

Dale was looking keenly at Henry Carlin. "Your son being killed by the evil eye? That is a serious statement, Mr. Carlin."

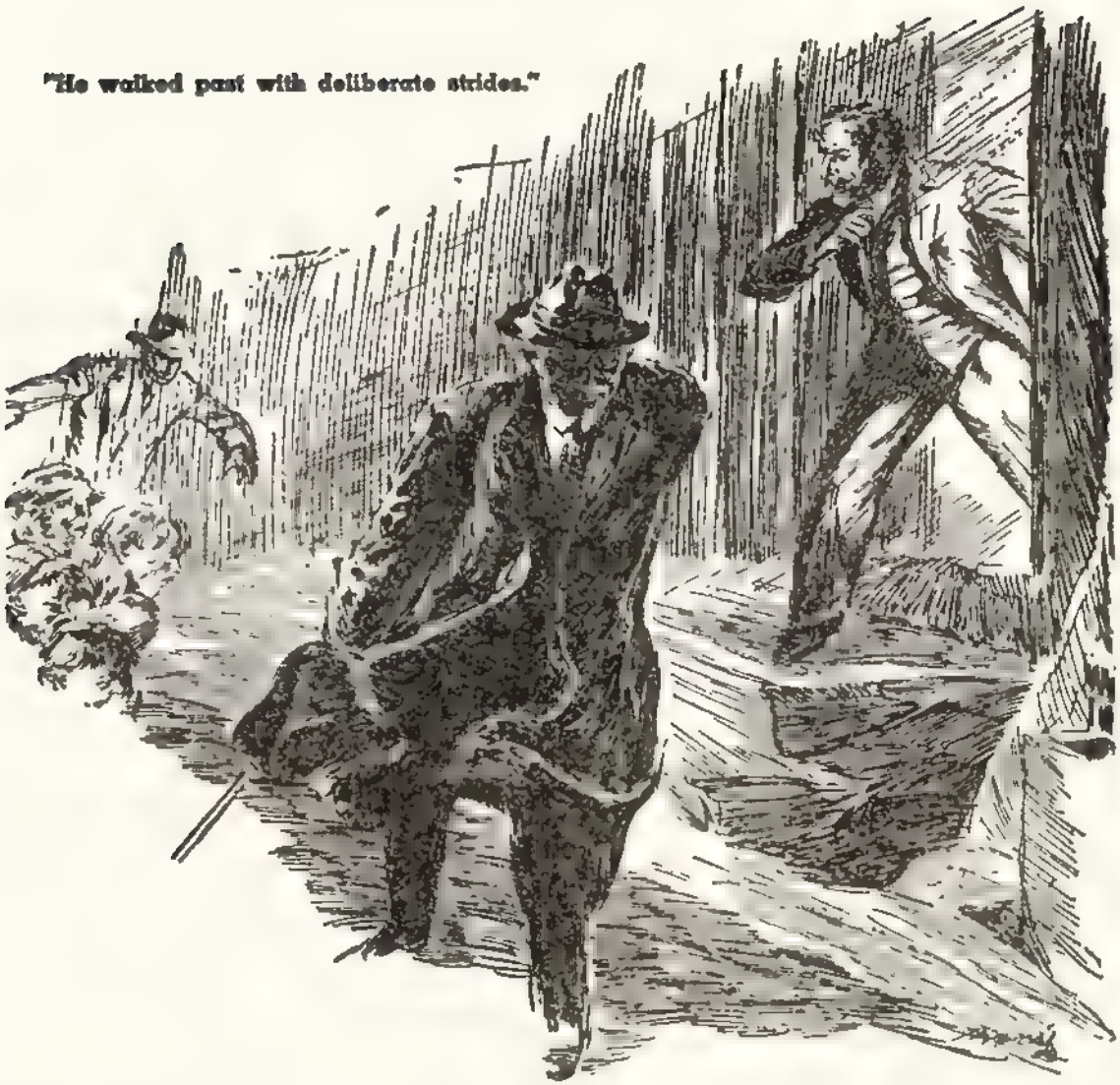
"I know, but I fear that's what is going on!" Henry Carlin said. "And the physicians in my son's case to whom I told my fears said that in such a matter you could best help."

"They told you the nature of my work?" Doctor Dale asked.

"Yes," answered Henry Carlin. "They said that you were a specialist in combating forces of evil whose manifestations lie beyond ordinary medical science. They said that you were known among physicians, in fact, as Doctor Dale, specialist in evil."

Doctor Dale nodded. "That is correct, Mr. Carlin. But this matter of the evil eye—are you sure you know what the evil eye is?"

"It's the power of some persons to strike people with sickness or death by



"He walked past with deliberate strides."

the gaze of their eyes, is it not?" Henry Carlin countered.

"That is the core of it but not all of it," Doctor Dale told him. "The evil eye is, as you say, the name generally given to the power of certain men and women to injure and kill living things by gazing into their eyes. This power they hold because of potent forces of evil that possess them and work through their gaze just as hypnotism, mesmerism and similar forces work through the gaze.

"A man or woman can assume this power of the evil eye by making deliberate compact with the forces of evil, which thereafter possess him and make his gaze deadly. Once assumed, this power of the evil eye becomes hereditary and his children will have it until he who assumed it revokes his compact. If he never revokes it, it will pass down from generation to generation inescapably; so that persons wholly innocent of evil intent will be born with the dread power of the evil eye.

"Unprotected people who meet the gaze of the evil eye sicken swiftly, for the forces in that malignant gaze strike in

through eyes and brain to damage in some way the vital life-centers of the nervous system. If exposed too often to that damaging gaze, they die. The only protection against the evil eye is certain symbols which evoke benign forces to oppose the malign ones of the evil eye. Such symbols are widely used, for the fear of the evil eye's dread power is great."

Henry Carlin had listened intently. "Then," he said quickly, "if some one were sickened by the evil eye but recovered, when exposed again to the evil eye he would sicken again?"

Doctor Dale nodded. "He would, undoubtedly. Those once stricken by the evil eye are thereafter vulnerable to it even though they wear the protective symbols I mentioned. The first striking has made them victims."

"That is as I thought," said Henry Carlin. "And that, Doctor Dale, is what I fear has happened to my son."

Doctor Dale sat back. "You'll save time, Mr. Carlin," he said quietly, "if you tell me about your son's case from the first."

His calmness steadied Henry Carlin, for he sat back a little less tensely in his chair. As he prepared to speak, Doctor Dale glanced at me, nodding at my pad in signal that I was to record the salient features of what Carlin told, as I did usually with Dale's clients.

"THE first of the thing," said Henry Carlin, "was about two months ago. That was when Donald—my son—met this Rose Mione and her family. I ought to say, perhaps, that Donald is only twenty-three and has just been out of school a year. He graduated a year ago from the Harvard School of Business Administration and came back up to Tauriston to take a position in the Tauriston National Bank, of which I am vice-president.

"Tauriston is a fair-sized city, a textile center, you know, but it and his work at the bank were rather dull for Donald after Cambridge and Boston. My wife died a year after Donald's birth, and perhaps Donald found home with only myself and our housekeeper dull also. He didn't complain, but I could see that he was a little restless and dissatisfied in Tauriston. That is, until two months ago.

"Two months ago Donald came home one evening in high spirits and told me he had met that day the most wonderful girl he had ever encountered. Her name, he said, was Rose Mione, and she lived with her father and grandfather, Joseph and Peter Mione, in the western part of Tauriston, where there is quite an Italian-American population. Donald raved about this girl in the next few days and said he meant to marry her if she would have him.

"I began to see that Donald was really serious about this Rose Mione, and though I would perhaps have preferred a marriage more in his own set, I certainly had no intention of standing in his way, the more so as he described the girl as very fine and cultured. Donald said she was too shy to call with him on me as yet, and I would probably have gone over with him to meet her had not Donald's affairs, a week after his meeting with this Mione girl, undergone an abrupt change.

"Donald had become very pale and ill-looking during the latter part of that week and I had grown concerned over his health. Things seemed suddenly going badly with him and the Mione girl also, for he returned from his visits very soon and very dejected in appearance. I was about to speak to him on the matter when Donald suddenly suffered a complete collapse.

"The physicians I called said he was in serious condition, that though his body was healthy enough his vital nerve-centers or inmost life-forces seemed to have been injured in some manner. They said the cause of it puzzled them, but that he must have complete rest. That is not what Mrs. Grassia, my housekeeper, said about it.

"Mrs. Grassia, who is of Italian descent, and has been with me for a dozen years, averred that Donald had been stricken by the evil eye of some one. Of course, I told her that that couldn't be, but she was very much in earnest about it and said that when Donald recovered he should be kept away from whatever person whose evil eye had stricken him, the *jettatore,* as the Italians call an evil-eyed person.

"I gave little thought to her words, for I was engrossed in helping Donald back to health. It took four weeks of complete rest before he was able to be up and about again, before his injured life-centers could recuperate from whatever hurt they had sustained. During those weeks Rose Mione did not come once to see him nor did she even telephone or write, and I admit that her indifference toward Donald's condition made me rather resentful toward her.

"But it did not change Donald, for as soon as he was able to get out he was over on the other side of Tauriston to see her. For three or four days he went, and each time came back downcast in appearance. I asked him bluntly what the trouble was and he said that Rose Mione seemed to have changed entirely in her feelings toward him. Then, only four days after getting out, Donald collapsed again!

"Just as before, the physicians agreed, Donald's vital nervous centers had suffered a mysterious hurt. He must have rest again, they said. But now Mrs. Grassia was much excited and told me that undoubtedly the evil eye of some one had stricken Donald again as she had feared. And this time I was not certain that she was wrong, for the doctors seemed wholly in the dark as to what force had so injured Donald's inmost life-centers.

"As Donald slowly recuperated again in the next few weeks I could see that his mind was on this Rose Mione constantly, and heard him utter her name once or twice in sleep. I determined at last to go over and ask her to come and see Donald, for I felt it would do him good. So two days ago I went over with that purpose in mind to the western section of Tauriston.

"THERE in the Italian-American district I asked where I could find the house of Peter Mione, Rose's grandfather. To my surprize, those whom I asked warned me volubly not to go to that house, making an odd gesture with their hands. They told me that the house of the Miones was a house accursed. For all three of the Miones, they asserted—Peter, his son Joseph, and his granddaughter Rose—possessed the evil eye and had already stricken more than one person in that district!

"I was astounded. The excited assertions of Mrs. Grassia that Donald had suffered from the evil eye recurred instantly to me. I remembered that it was directly after meeting this Rose Mione that Donald had become ill and weak and then had collapsed. And after he had recovered slowly, he had seen her but three or four days when he had collapsed again.

"These people were firm in their assertions that the Miones all had the evil eye, were deadly *jettatori.* Instead of visiting them, therefore, I returned home determined first to find out if that were really so. I asked the physicians who had

worked with Donald whether the evil eye could really be responsible for his condition. They said that it might, but that such a direct manifestation of evil forces was outside their experience and skill.

"They told me that Doctor John Dale of New York, known as the specialist in evil, could best help me in such a case. So this morning I drove down from Tauriston to New York, Doctor Dale, and I want you to come back to Tauriston with me, today, now. I said nothing of my fears to Donald, but I want you to find out whether it is really the evil eye of these Miones that has stricken him and is killing him, and if it is that which is doing it I want you to find some way to save my son!"

Henry Carlin's face was white and working as he stopped, his hands outstretched in unconscious appeal.

Doctor Dale had listened intently, his hazel eyes on Carlin's face as he talked, while I had been busy noting down what he told.

Dale pulled his short beard thoughtfully. "You say that your son after recovering from his first collapse had seen this Rose Mione for only three or four days before collapsing again?" he asked.

"Yes," Henry Carlin answered, "and it was the suddenness of this second attack that appalled me."

Doctor Dale nodded. "Having been already once stricken by the evil eye, if that it was, he would be even more affected when it struck him a second time. What about the gesture you say they made in Tauriston's Italian section when you asked about the Miones? Was it like this?"

Dale closed his right hand, so that it took on a horn-like shape, index and little finger projecting outward.

"That was the gesture exactly," Carlin said quickly.

"The sign of those who fear the evil eye," Doctor Dale commented.

He thought silently for a moment.

"Mr. Carlin, I'm going to take the case, and Owen and I will go back up with you now to Tauriston as you ask. I must have time, though, to select the equipment we'll want to take with us."

"Of course," said Henry Carlin. "And Doctor Dale, any fee——"

"We can discuss fees later," Dale told him. "If your son has really been stricken by the evil eye of these Miones, the sooner we get up there the better. For those once stricken by the evil eye who escape death from it in the end are—few!"

Two hours later Doctor Dale and I were with Henry Carlin in his powerful coupé, driving northward from New York at a fast rate toward Tauriston.

2

TAURISTON, when we reached it just at the afternoon's end, proved the New England factory city I had expected. A century before, Tauriston had been a quiet little country town. But textile factories had sprung up beside the river west of the town, and there had been a mushroom growth there of tall-chimneyed mills, railroad sidings and warehouses.

The factories had brought to Tauriston an influx of foreign-born workers and their families who now inhabited the rows of dingy frame and brick houses in the city's western half. On the southeastern side of the city were neater residential streets with a few shaded and quiet avenues of pretentious houses. Into one of these avenues Henry Carlin drove.

He turned into the drive of a large Colonial-style mansion half hidden by the green elms set closely about it.

"My home," said Henry Carlin as Doctor Dale and I got out of the car with

him. "And here's Mrs. Grassia to meet us."

We went up the steps, Dale carrying his small black equipment-case and I our suitcase. A woman dressed in black awaited us at the door, her hair cloudy white but her face smooth and her black eyes quick and bright.

"Mr. Donald's all right?" Henry Carlin asked her anxiously as we entered, and she nodded.

"He is much better, he says. He told me he wanted to go out but I told him you would not like that."

"This is Doctor Dale and Mr. Owen, Mrs. Grassia," Carlin introduced. "Please have their things taken upstairs."

"We'll go in and see Donald now, if you don't mind," he added to us. "He's in the sun room—down this hall."

Doctor Dale and I followed him down the thickly carpeted hall, whose walls were of paneled wood, my companion retaining his equipment-case. As we went around a turn I glanced back and saw the housekeeper looking intently after us.

Henry Carlin opened a door and we preceded him into a room whose three sides were of glass through which poured the waning evening light. There were fine wicker chairs and potted plants, and in one of the chairs sat a young fellow in a loose lounge suit, leaning back as though dozing.

He sat up, though, as we entered. Donald Carlin hardly seemed his twenty-three years in appearance, a youngster with rusty light hair and blue eyes that were attractive despite their weariness. For there were weariness and weakness plain in his pale face, as though deep illness had caused an ebbing of his vital forces.

"Donald, this is Doctor John Dale, whom I told you I would try to bring up with me," Henry Carlin made introduction, "and Mr. Harley Owen, his assistant."

Donald Carlin put out his hand to us with a half-annoyed smile. "I told Dad I didn't need doctors any more," he said, "but I couldn't convince him. I understand you're a specialist of some sort?"

Doctor Dale nodded as he took the chair Henry Carlin proffered. "Yes, you may call me a psychological specialist. I'm told that your illness has rather puzzled your physicians."

Donald Carlin made an impatient gesture. "Those doctors have tried to make a mystery of it because I felt weak. All I needed was a little rest, and I feel almost as well as ever, now."

"You felt nothing but weakness?" Doctor Dale asked him. "I mean, you've suffered no pain at all?"

"None at all," young Carlin answered. "That's what puzzled them, I guess—my feeling a loss of strength without any pain."

"You can't describe what you felt more accurately?" Dale asked. "There are many different kinds of weakness, you know."

Donald Carlin hesitated. "Well, it was a feeling as though something inside me, some very important part of me, had been hurt painlessly. Does that sound silly? Yet that's what it felt like most, a hurt that didn't give pain but that made me very weak."

"When did you first experience this painless hurt?" Doctor Dale asked him. "Can you remember?"

Carlin nodded slowly. "Yes, it was a day about eight weeks ago. I remember because it was the day I met Rose Mione, a girl I—a girl I became acquainted with then. I couldn't sleep that night, partly from excitement and partly because I felt that painless hurt."

Henry Carlin's breath came in with a sharp hiss and Doctor Dale looked warn-

ingly at him. Then he turned back to Donald.

"You felt this weakness and hurt in the days that followed?"

"Yes, and a little worse each day," Donald declared. "I got so weak at last that I collapsed. For a few weeks I was pretty ill, I guess, but gradually my strength came back."

"You've had the feeling since, though?" Dale asked, and Donald Carlin nodded.

"Yes, the first time I went out. It got quickly worse again the next few days and on the fourth day I collapsed again. I'm just getting over that second attack now, as I suppose Dad told you."

"You had visited Miss Mione each of those three or four days?"

Donald Carlin looked surprized. "Yes, I had. What has that to do with it?"

"Nothing much," Dale smiled. "You had no other sensations than this painless hurt and weakness?"

Young Carlin hesitated again. "Yes, I did have another feeling, a sort of hallucination, I guess. It was a sensation during sleep of eyes fastened upon me, looking fixedly at me."

Henry Carlin whitened, and Doctor Dale bent tensely forward. "What kind of eyes?" he asked. "Eyes of some one you know?"

Donald Carlin was even more reluctant. "Well, they did seem like—this is pretty silly, perhaps—did seem like the eyes of Rose—the Rose Mione I mentioned. They were dark and beautiful and strange, like hers."

"The eyes of this Miss Mione are strange, then? In what way?"

"Why, I don't know exactly," Donald said. "They seem so dark and with such depths, and somehow when you meet them they seem to give you a tangible shock. It's an inherited oddity, I suppose —her grandfather's and father's eyes are the same."

Doctor Dale stood up. His face was as calm and unmoved as ever but I knew that he was inwardly excited. He turned to Henry Carlin.

"I think we'll not bother your son further today," he said. "There's plenty of time tomorrow to go into the case."

Donald Carlin smiled. "I hope you're not wasting your time," he said. "I'm a pretty healthy patient, fit to go out now again."

"But you mustn't go out yet, Donald," Henry Carlin told him anxiously. "We don't want you to have another relapse."

"I don't promise," said Donald, smiling. "You're trying to keep me a sick man even after I'm well."

ONCE Doctor Dale and Henry Carlin and I were in the hall with the sun room's door closed behind us, Carlin grasped Dale's arm.

"Doctor Dale, you heard? The eyes of this Rose Mione—then it must be really what I feared!"

"It certainly indicates that the evil eye of the Miones has stricken your son," Dale stated. "But to be sure I'll have to see them, especially the girl. Owen and I will go over now to see them."

"But if they actually have this terrible power you'll be risking yourselves in visiting them!" Henry Carlin objected.

Dale shook his head, took from his black case some small objects he slipped into his pocket. "These protective symbols will shield us from that power. You said these Miones live on the other side of the city?"

"Yes, almost straight across Tauriston from here," Henry Carlin said. "The street is Cardell Street and I suppose any one on it can tell you where the Miones live."

"We'll get going, then," Doctor Dale said. "We'll be back in a couple of hours."

We went out, Henry Carlin looking after us in dumb anxiety and then turning to go back to his son, I guessed. Mrs. Grassia too looked after us intently as though she knew our errand.

NIGHT's darkness had replaced the slow-dying evening light, as we struck across Tauriston. When we reached the business and amusement section at the city's center, shops and theaters were alight with their scrolls of colored light. We pushed on into the dingy foreign section westward. Northwestward from it the silent factories brooded blackly beside the river, but the foreign section's ill-lit streets were noisy with life.

Swarthy men and women sauntered singly and in groups in search of distraction after the day's work. Crackling Italian and musical Spanish and Portuguese, with undertones of guttural Balkan tongues and occasional bursts of shrill laughter, came from them. There were piercing cries from the dusty, bare-legged youngsters who ran in games under the street-lights, while through the hubbub could be heard the twang of a guitar or the strident tones of a cornet.

We were directed, with much pointing and contradiction, to Cardell Street, and found it a short dark street running down a slope toward the bank of the river. It was of square, box-like frame houses, with street-lights only at its upper end. People sat on the porches of these houses and a few moved along the street, but there was much less noise and tumult here than in the streets behind us.

We stopped a little way down the street, looking about. "I'd prefer not to mention the Miones down here," Doctor Dale said, "but we'll have to find out where they live."

He walked up onto the porch of the house outside which we stood. Light streaming out from the window of the house's front room showed a stout Italian woman of middle age sitting on the porch.

She regarded Doctor Dale with unfriendly black eyes. "Sorry to bother you," Dale said politely, "but we want to ask where some one lives."

"Who is it that you want to know about?" she asked.

"A family named Mione," Dale told her. "I believe the name of the head of it is Peter Mione."

The woman's eyes widened in astonished terror. She made a sign with her hand so swiftly I could hardly follow it, the sign against the evil eye Doctor Dale had demonstrated to Carlin, and darted into the house, from which her voice came in a babble of excited Italian.

There were other voices in the same tongue within, male and female; then they broke off and a man shouldered bruskly out onto the porch to confront us. He was stocky, clean-shaven, black-haired and with smoldering black eyes.

"What do you want with the Miones?" he demanded. "You are friends of theirs?"

"Not exactly friends—I've never met them," Doctor Dale said.

"Then do not meet them!" the other told us. "They are *jettatori*—they have what you call the evil eye! I, Domenic Millera, warn you of that!"

"Why do you think the Miones have the evil eye?" Dale asked.

"Think? I think not—I know!" Millera said passionately. "Come here and I will show you how I know!"

He grasped Doctor Dale's arm and pulled him through the door, I following closely. We found ourselves in a room lit by an unshaded gas jet. There was another man in it, and two women, one of them the one who had gone in from the porch, all three looking fixedly at us.

In the room's corner was a wooden bed, the only furniture save for a few chairs, and in it lay a girl of about seventeen. Her face was thin and weak, and from that pale countenance black eyes whose pupils were extraordinarily contracted looked incuriously at us.

Millera led Dale and me over to the bed, pointed down at the girl. "My daughter Julia," he told us, tragically. "*She* is why I know the Miones are *jettatori.*"

Doctor Dale's keen gaze lifted from the sick girl to her father. "You mean that this girl was sickened by——"

"By the evil eye of that ever to be accursed old Peter Mione, yes!" cried Domenic Millera. "Wizard and *jettatore* he is like all his house, evil-eyed like his son Joseph and his son's daughter Rose. And Peter Mione I angered when I said that he should be punished for killing the Safetta boy with his gaze as he did. Because he hated me for that, he struck my Julia with his evil gaze, she having no protection against it. Since then has she sickened here while the accursed Mione who made her so walks the streets still unpunished!"

Millera's hand made an imprecatory gesture, the others in the smoky-lit room nodding solemnly. The sick girl did not move.

"You say a boy was killed by Peter Mione's evil eye?" Dale questioned, and Millera nodded.

"Yes, the widow Safetta's son, Felix Safetta. The child's mother had angered Mione and that was his revenge. Should not such a family be blotted from the earth?"

Doctor Dale shook his head as he went out onto the porch again with Millera. "Such a thing would be terrible," he said. "But your daughter seems recovering."

"Yes, she recovers now that we keep her in where the evil eye of the Miones can not fall on her," Domenic Millera said, "but so slowly."

"And you can tell us where the Mione house is on this street?"

"You should not go there, but I have warned you what they are," Millera told us. "Their home is down at this street's end above the river——"

He stopped suddenly, looking up the street. A hush had descended abruptly all along it, the people on porches who had been talking becoming suddenly silent and going inside. Women farther down the street were hastily calling in children who had been playing. Those who had sauntered along the sidewalk hastily turned in at houses.

A man was coming down the street from the illuminated upper end. He was a tall, straight black figure against that illumination, wearing a soft black hat and also a long black coat despite the evening's warmth, and carrying a stick. As he came closer, Millera drew us back into the shadows. Now the man was passing.

He was old, I saw, for his face, half visible in the darkness, was wrinkled, and the hair at his temples was iron-gray. His eyes were hidden by his hat's shadow but we could see that his features were sardonic, strongly cut, powerful. He walked past with deliberate strides, and as he went on down the street those who had retreated inside their houses emerged again onto their porches, looking after his dark form until it disappeared in the darkness at the street's lower end.

"Who was that?" Doctor Dale asked, and Domenic Millera shook his fist passionately at the darkness that had swallowed the dark figure.

"It was the *jettatore,* the evil-eyed one you asked about! Yes, Peter Mione himself, head of that accursed house of the evil eye!"

3

MILLERA went abruptly back into the house, and Doctor Dale and I started down the street. It was quite dark in its lower part but we could see that there were fewer houses there, and could make out the dull gleam of the river beyond and below.

"It seems the Miones are well enough known here," Dale commented.

"Dale, was that girl really a victim of the evil eye?" I asked.

"She had all the symptoms of the evil eye's victims, Owen," he answered. "Whether—but this house ahead must be the one we want."

The slope of Cardell Street ended abruptly ahead of us in a sheer drop of thirty feet that was the bank of the river below. A stone wall ran along the top of this bank, and the last house on the street was built directly against this wall.

This house, which we knew must be that of Peter Mione and his family, was a darker square bulk in the darkness, a porchless frame structure whose front door opened directly onto the sidewalk. Cracks of light showed from under its drawn blinds. The two or three houses next up the street from it and the similar ones across the street were dark and untenanted, attesting that none in the neighborhood would live so near the house of the Miones.

Doctor Dale and I had stopped in the darkness a little up the street from the house. Now Dale took from his pocket two objects, one of which he handed me. I inspected it by the faint street-light from up the street, and made it out to be a two-inch silver disk on which was graven a curious device.

The design was a representation of a staring human eye and around it were seven smaller designs of scorpion, dog, deer, arrows, serpent, lion and owl. On the disk's back was a pin-like clasp. As I held the thing I was aware somehow of strange energies acting from it, as though it were the container of an alien force.

"Put it on your lapel, Owen," said Dale, affixing his own in that place. "It's the most effective of the symbols that oppose benign forces to the malign ones of the evil eye."

I fastened it to my lapel as he directed. "You're going to call directly on these Miones, Dale?" I asked, and he nodded.

"We've got to find out whether they really possess the evil eye's dread power before we can act."

Doctor Dale and I then walked on down to the door of the house and he knocked on it. There was no answer and Dale was about to knock again when the door opened, light flooding out upon us.

A girl's slender figure stood outlined in the door's opening against that light. She was over medium height and clad in a simple dark blue dress. Her hair was a dark cloud behind an oval face that was faintly olive-tinged, with delicately chiseled features and a sad mouth. Sadness was in all that fine face, indeed, but one scarcely saw it in the first galvanic meeting with her eyes.

Her eyes were of soft velvet black and their pupils were abnormally large. In the moment that I first looked into those eyes it was as though I perceived in their dark depths the movement of something darker, a black stirring of force there. And it was, in the same instant, as though there smote out from those eyes at mine a tangible shock of force!

But it was a shock that did not reach me. It seemed not to strike me but to strike the alien forces that clung about me from the symbol at my lapel. Only a moment did it endure, that outthrust of deadly force from those dark eyes and its shock against the invisible shield

about me. Then it was gone and the girl was looking half fearfully at Doctor Dale and myself, seeing the symbols at our lapels.

"What do you want?" she asked, her voice low and unsteady.

"You're Miss Rose Mione, are you not?" Doctor Dale asked, and she nodded dumbly.

"I've come in regard to Donald Carlin," Dale went on. "I'm his physician at present—Doctor John Dale, and this is my assistant, Mr. Owen—and would like to consult you about his illness."

The girl's hand went to her throat. "About Donald? But I can tell you nothing about his illness—I know nothing about it!"

"Then you do not even know," Doctor Dale said, "why Donald Carlin has sickened after each time he has been down here and has met the gaze of your eyes?"

Before the terrified Rose Mione could answer there was an exclamation from behind her in a man's voice. "What is this about Rose's eyes?"

Peter Mione stood behind the girl, gazing out at us. He was bareheaded now, and under his iron-gray hair his saturnine, wrinkled face was like the ancient mask of some evil god in its consciousness of evil power. He glanced first at the symbols at our lapels, then swiftly into the eyes of Doctor Dale and myself.

The eyes of Peter Mione were like those of the girl, black and abnormally large-pupiled, deeply astir with dark force. And as Doctor Dale and I met those eyes, I felt again and even more strongly the shock of tangible and deadly forces darting out from them against the invisible protecting shield about me.

Rose Mione turned and disappeared back into the house, leaving Peter Mione confronting us at the doorway.

"What is this about Rose's eyes?" he repeated. "And who are you that come about Donald Carlin?"

"I'm Doctor John Dale and I came here because Donald Carlin got his sickness here when he was stricken by the evil eye of your granddaughter!" Doctor Dale told him calmly.

Peter Mione laughed coldly, considering Dale and me as though with amused contempt. "Another who thinks we poor Miones have the evil eye!" he mocked. "You have heard the superstitions of the people about here too much, Doctor Dale."

"Is it superstition that has stricken Domenic Millera's daughter, then?" asked Doctor Dale, and at that thrust Peter Mione's face became diabolical, his eyes terrifying in their black naked evil.

"What do you know of Millera's daughter?" he snarled.

Another man appeared at that moment beside him from within the house, less tall than Peter Mione and of middle age. His sensitive face bore more resemblance to the girl's than to the older man's. But his black eyes were like those of both the others, strange forces moving deep within them—forces that struck out as we met his gaze to hit with tangible shock against our protecting mantles of force!

"Father, what's going on?" he exclaimed to Peter Mione. "Rose said there were men here asking about young Carlin——"

"Be silent, Joseph," snapped Peter Mione. "They are but two fools more like those who live around here."

He turned back to us, his dark eyes demoniac in their fierceness. "Whoever you are that accuse us Miones of the evil eye," he rasped, "you would do well not to meddle here again. The evil eye's power might strike you when you were not wearing those things that you wear now."

"You do not frighten me, Peter Mi-

one," Doctor Dale told him steadily. "Not the evil eye of yourself nor of all your house. There are forces greater than the forces of evil from which you get your power, and they can be used, if need be, against you!"

Peter Mione's face became so dreadful that for a moment I thought he was about to attack us physically. His black eyes seemed projectors of a force that beat almost irresistibly against the shield of force our symbols flung about us. Then he pushed Joseph Mione swiftly back and closed the door with a slam in our faces.

DOCTOR DALE turned to me, his own hazel eyes alight, as we started back up the dark street. "It's as I feared, Owen!" he exclaimed. "Peter Mione and his son and granddaughter all possess the evil eye! You felt the shock of forces from their eyes? Owen, had it not been for the benign opposing forces gathered about us by the symbols we wore, those forces of the evil gaze of the three would have struck us down where we stood!"

"But, Dale, how are we to fight a thing like that?" I asked him. "Resisting the evil eye isn't overcoming it."

"Yet it can be overcome," Doctor Dale said. "It——"

He stopped suddenly and grasping my arm moved quickly off the sidewalk into the deeper darkness between two of the empty houses beside us. A car with bright headlights was coming down the dark street toward us, its brakes squealing as it slowed.

The car, a long roadster, passed us and came to a stop a little above the house of the Miones. A dark figure got out of the machine, a man who walked toward the Mione house and knocked on its front door. The door was opened a little, cautiously, and in its light-filled opening we saw the girl, Rose Mione. And as the light fell out on the face of the man outside we saw that it was young Donald Carlin!

Rose Mione uttered an exclamation, tried to close the door upon him, but Carlin held it open and seemed entreating her, his voice reaching us only as a low, pleading sound. The girl seemed undecided, not looking at all at Donald Carlin's face, and then as he made as though to push inside, she came out, closing the door behind her.

"Dale, it's young Carlin!" I whispered tensely. "Shall we rush him and get him away from her? If her eyes hit him again——"

"No, Owen, wait!" Doctor Dale murmured. "She's not looking at him at all. I think he's safe with her for the time being, though I don't understand——"

In the darkness the forms of Rose Mione and Donald Carlin were coming up the street as though the girl was leading him away from the house a little. I could see that she was keeping her face turned away from him, as Dale said, though he was talking earnestly to her.

They halted on the sidewalk just out from the deep shadows between houses in which Doctor Dale and I crouched. We could see them more distinctly there, in the faint light from up-street, and could hear their words. Donald Carlin had caught the girl's arm as they stopped.

"Rose, what's the matter with you?" he asked her anxiously. "You act so strangely—you aren't even listening to me!"

"I am listening, Donald," she told him, her voice low. "I've heard everything you've said."

"But you don't even look at me!" he said. "Surely you're not as angry as that with me for coming, are you?"

"I told you not to come," Rose Mione told him. "Had it not been that I didn't want you to come in the house where Father and Grandfather are, I would not have come out here with you."

"But why not?" Donald Carlin demanded. "Rose, I love you and I believe you still love me. What has changed you so?—what has come between us like this? I've felt it ever since a few days before my illness—until then we were so happy, but you changed suddenly and ever since have been putting me off and refusing to see me, without telling me why. What is all this mystery that has made you act so strangely?"

"I can't tell you!" Rose Mione said, a sob in her voice. "But you must go, Donald, and you mustn't come to see me again, ever."

"I won't do it!" declared Donald Carlin. "Rose, tell me, is it your grandfather and father who have objected to me? Is that it?"

"Yes—no—it's more than that!" the girl exclaimed. "I can't tell you, Donald, but you must do as I say."

Even then, as Doctor Dale and I could see from our concealment, Rose Mione did not turn her face toward young Carlin. She spoke wildly but looked past him always and not into his pleading face.

"Do as you say? Never see you again?" said Donald Carlin. "Why, I'd die first! Whatever is between us, I'm going to destroy it!"

"You can't!" cried the girl. "There's nothing you can do, Donald! You must go and not come back—I can never look into your face again!"

Donald Carlin looked amazedly at her. Rose Mione, still looking away from him, was sobbing. "Please go, Donald," she said; "go before something terrible happens."

"What could happen?" he protested. "Rose, you're so strange I think you must be ill. You don't even look at me. Look me in the face and tell me to go, at least!"

With the words Donald Carlin swung the girl around to make her face him, but she broke free and kept her face away from him.

"Donald, don't!" Rose Mione's agonized cry stabbed the darkness. "You don't know what you're doing!"

"But I only wanted you to look at me," Donald Carlin was saying stupefiedly, when the door of the Mione house farther down the street opened, a man's figure emerging and looking up the street.

"Donald, you must go at once—please go!" Rose Mione pleaded, her voice utter in its urgency. "They heard me—it's Grandfather or Father coming out, and if you meet them——"

"But I don't see——" Carlin began, then stopped. "All right, Rose: I'll go, but I'm coming back. No matter what you or any one else says, I'm coming back."

He got into the roadster, its motor hummed, and in a moment he had turned the car and it was heading back up the street.

As it did so the man from the house reached Rose Mione and we saw now that it was her father, Joseph Mione.

"Rose, I heard you cry out and came out to find you! Who was that you were talking to?"

She did not answer, and his voice was stern when it sounded again. "It was Donald Carlin, then? Did you not say you would see him no more?"

"He came and insisted on talking to me!" she sobbed. "He would have come inside where you and Grandfather were; so I came out—but didn't meet his eyes——"

She clung to Joseph Mione, still sobbing, and in the faint light we could see that his face was strange as he held and soothed her. Then he walked back with her to the house and in a moment the door there closed.

DALE and I stood up from our crouching posture. I found that I was tense after what we had heard.

"Dale, what does it all mean?" I asked, as we stepped out again onto the sidewalk.

Doctor Dale's face was serious. "I wish I knew, Owen," he said. "It is certain that Rose Mione has the evil eye like her father and grandfather and that she struck Donald Carlin down with its power weeks ago. Yet tonight she seemed trying to save him from her deadly gaze."

"And according to what Joseph Mione said she had promised him not to see young Carlin again," I added. "It's too mysterious for me."

"Well, there's nothing more for us to do down here tonight," Dale told me. "We've ascertained beyond doubt that it is the evil eye of these Miones that has stricken young Carlin, and we'd best get back to the Carlin house."

We started up the street. It was well toward midnight by then and Cardell Street was mostly dark. The front window of Domenic Millera's house still glowed with light as we passed, though, and I wondered if Millera were sitting there with his stricken daughter.

WHEN we got back across Tauriston to the house of Henry Carlin we found that Donald Carlin had already returned and retired but that his father was awaiting us. Henry Carlin listened silently but with white face intent as Doctor Dale told him what we had learned.

"So it is those Miones' evil eye that struck Donald, even as I feared," he commented when Dale had finished. "Doctor Dale, what are we to do?"

"The main thing," Dale told him, "is to keep Donald away from them. He escaped tonight, but only because the Mione girl kept her gaze turned from him."

"But how can I keep him from this Rose Mione when he's still in love with her?" Henry Carlin asked. "He slipped out tonight without letting Mrs. Grassia nor me know, and he will again. And if I tell Donald the truth about the girl he'll think it more reason to stick to her."

"Yet if he sees her again, if he meets the eyes of any of those three again, it may well be fatal," Doctor Dale warned. "I have in mind a way by which something may be done, but for the time being the all-important thing is to keep Donald away from the Miones."

Henry Carlin's pale face took on a certain resolution. "Then I will see that he does not go there again," he said, determination in his eyes. "I think I know a way to make sure of that."

"Well, we'll be seeing you in the morning then," Doctor Dale said, rising. "Owen and I could stand some sleep right now."

It was, in fact, after seven next morning when Doctor Dale and I rose. Before going downstairs Dale looked into Donald Carlin's room. Young Carlin was sleeping normally, so we went on down.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Grassia, met us in the hall below and before either of us could speak she had clutched Doctor Dale's arm excitedly, her eyes distended with fear.

"Doctor, he's gone—Mr. Carlin! I could not stop him!" she cried.

"Gone? Where did Mr. Carlin go?" Dale asked.

"To the house of the *jettatori*—to the Miones! He went but now, saying he would so threaten those Miones that they would never dare again to have Donald come there!"

Doctor Dale's face went white and he spun toward me. "Owen, we've got to head him off! Henry Carlin down there without protection facing the evil eye of those three! We've got to stop him!"

4

WE RACED out of the house to the garage behind it, and in a few moments I was driving Donald Carlin's long roadster rapidly across Tauriston. Traffic was not thick so early in the morning, and I did not need Doctor Dale's urging to make me unloose all the roadster's power. We shot through Tauriston's morning-lit streets into the western foreign section at a perilous velocity.

As I turned the car down Cardell Street, Doctor Dale uttered an exclamation. Down at the sloping street's end, where the square black house of the Miones perched above the sunlit river, a big coupé had stopped and a man who had got out of it was standing at the door of the Mione house. It was Henry Carlin and in the door which had just opened Peter Mione was confronting him.

As our car shot down the street we saw that Henry Carlin was speaking rapidly, angrily, and that Peter Mione's face was twisted with fury. I stopped our car and we sprang out and ran toward the two. But as we did so Peter Mione thrust his rage-contorted face forward a little, his eyes full on Carlin's for a moment. Then he disappeared back into the house, slamming the door. And Henry Carlin, struck suddenly silent, crumpled to the sidewalk unconscious as Doctor Dale and I reached him.

"Owen, we're too late!" cried Doctor Dale as we bent over Carlin. "Peter Mione has stricken him!"

A few bareheaded people were running down the street, Domenic Millera among them. "The Miones have stricken another?" he cried to us. "The *jettatori!*"

We bundled Henry Carlin into the roadster. There was no sound from the Mione house, but the excited people in front of it were increasing rapidly in number. I could hear Millera's passionate voice among them.

I took the wheel again and with Doctor Dale holding Henry Carlin's unmoving form I drove at an even faster rate up the street and across the city to the Carlin house.

DONALD CARLIN sprang to meet us, Mrs. Grassia's fearful face behind him, as we carried his father in.

"What's happened to Dad?" he cried as we carried Henry Carlin into the library.

"The *jettatori!*" Mrs. Grassia was exclaiming. "They have killed him, then——"

"He's not killed!" Dale snapped. "Help us put him on that couch—that's right, straighten him out."

With Henry Carlin stretched on the couch, pale and unmoving, Doctor Dale sent the housekeeper for his equipment case. To Donald Carlin's excited questions he paid no heed for the moment, bending over his father.

Henry Carlin seemed in strange condition. His pulse had slowed alarmingly and his breathing was labored as though some force had strongly affected the respiratory nerve-centers. The pupils of his eyes were terrifyingly contracted to mere points of blue, just as those of the girl Julia Millera had been, but even more so.

Doctor Dale quickly took his case from Mrs. Grassia when she returned, selected a vial of clear liquid and made a hypodermic injection of it above Henry Carlin's heart. He broke two capsules also under his nostrils and Carlin stirred a little, his labored breathing seeming to ease somewhat. His heart action also began to accelerate.

Carlin's unconsciousness seemed to pass now into a more or less normal sleep.

The eye-pupils expanded a little. Doctor Dale stood up.

"He's out of danger for now," he said. "He'll probably sleep the rest of the day and is going to need a few weeks of complete rest."

"But what happened?" Donald Carlin repeated. "Did Dad have an attack of some sort?"

Dale looked at him and nodded. "A worse kind of attack than you think, Donald. But I'm going to tell you about it soon—I want you to stay here with your father now for Owen and I have work elsewhere."

We left Donald Carlin watching over his sleeping father. Once out in the car again Dale's face became grim.

"Back to Cardell Street, Owen," he said. "You're still wearing your protective symbol? Keep it on—we're going to visit the Miones again."

"Dale!" I exclaimed as I headed the roadster westward again, "you're going to——"

"Going to act in the way that will be most effective against Peter Mione!" Doctor Dale said.

WHEN we turned into the upper end of Cardell Street I stopped the car in surprize. Doctor Dale and I stared downward.

An angry crowd of several score men and women had gathered in front of the house of the Miones. There came up to us from them a babble of excited voices, and more of the Italian-American residents of the street were joining it each moment.

We stopped the car, and Doctor Dale and I started down the street on foot. We could see now that Domenic Millera was in the foremost of the crowd and was shouting to them, pointing to the Mione house, which remained silent with doors and windows closed.

"How long must we stand this family of evil, this house of *jettatori?*" Millera was crying. "Must still more be stricken as one was but now before we root out these accursed ones of the evil eye?"

"Kill the *jettatori!*" went up a dozen fierce cries from the crowd. "Death to the evil-eyed!"

"Yes, kill them as Peter Mione killed my Felix with his evil eye!" screamed a wild-faced woman who was apparently the widow Safetta, whom Millera had mentioned to us.

The crowd was surging toward the house, Domenic Millera in its front rank, his face suffused with passion.

"Death to the *jettatori!*" went up the cry more strongly.

"Dale, there's going to be violence!" I exclaimed.

"No, look!" Doctor Dale said, and we stopped.

The uproar had abruptly broken off, the crowd's cries silenced as though by magic. The door of the Mione house was opening.

Peter Mione stood on its threshold. He wore his soft black hat and long coat, stick in his hand. He looked out on the crowd and on his face was a smile of sardonic amusement.

For perhaps a half-minute the men and women of the crowd stared open-mouthed at Peter Mione, standing there like some mocking incarnation of ancient evil. Then a woman shrieked *"Jettatore!"* and turned to flee.

Instantly her panic spread to the others and they too shrank back to avoid the eyes of Peter Mione, recoiled and then fled. Domenic Millera and the Safetta woman were among them, Millera's face hate-filled but fear triumphing over his hate.

Almost incredibly swiftly the crowd melted, Doctor Dale pulling me back behind an angle of the house beside us, as those in the street hastily sought their

own houses. Peter Mione watched from his door until the street seemed entirely deserted.

Then, calmly as though he had been watching only some concourse of animals that for a moment had blocked his way, Peter Mione closed the door behind him and moved coolly up the street. He passed the house behind an angle of which Doctor Dale and I shrank farther back, and disappeared when he turned at the street's top.

THE street remained silent and deserted as Doctor Dale and I went out again to the sidewalk.

"It turned out as I expected, Owen," Dale told me. "Their fear of the evil eye was greater than their fury."

"Dale, are you going on down to the house?" I asked. "Peter Mione won't be there."

"I let him pass without seeing us purposely," Doctor Dale said. "I want to see Joseph and Rose Mione when he is not there—I have an idea about them that I want to prove or disprove."

We went on down the street, therefore, and Doctor Dale knocked at the door. He was forced to knock for minutes before it opened.

Joseph Mione confronted us, pale and distraught. But again from his eyes as we met them struck the same shock of tangible and deadly forces against the forces shielding us.

"I've got to see you and your daughter, now!" Doctor Dale said.

"What do you want?" groaned Joseph Mione. "Has there not been trouble enough here today?"

"There has and that's why I'm here," Dale said incisively. "I think it will be much better for both of you if you see us."

Joseph Mione hesitated, then opened the door wider. As Doctor Dale and I entered he locked the door behind us.

Dale and I found ourselves in a comfortable room, with flowers, a few fine prints, an old piano. Rose Mione was in the room, even paler than her father. Once more I felt that impact of alien forces to which I was now almost accustomed, as I met her dark, deep eyes.

Joseph Mione put his arm across her shoulders, facing us.

"I am not going to waste words," said Doctor Dale. "Both of you know how Henry Carlin was stricken at your door this morning."

Joseph Mione nodded dully. "We saw —we were in here when he came. He threatened my father about young Carlin coming here, and Father——"

"Your father struck him with his evil eye!" Dale finished for him. "And because your father has that dread power of the evil eye, you and your daughter have it also, since the evil eye's power descends automatically from one generation to another once it is assumed.

"What I want to ask, though," Doctor Dale continued keenly, "and what I would not have thought to ask at all but for certain things I heard last night, is this: Would you and your daughter rather be without this power of the evil eye?"

"Can you ask such a question?" cried Joseph Mione passionately. "Do you think such a power pleases Rose and me? Do you think it pleases us that we can not look even at those we love without our gaze blasting them? We never could have desired this terrible power of the evil eye, but because my father had assumed it by compact with forces of evil, I and my daughter after me were born with it. And we can not now escape it."

"I thought it might be thus," Doctor Dale said. "But if it were possible to lift this power of the evil eye from you?"

Rose Mione answered swiftly. "To have it lifted I would give almost my life!"

"It can never be lifted," Joseph Mione said hopelessly. "Only my father, by revoking his black compact with the forces of evil, can lift the evil eye from himself and us, and that he will never do."

"Do not be too sure of that," Doctor Dale advised. "But before going further, I want you to tell me when and how your father first assumed this power of the evil eye."

Joseph Mione motioned dumbly to chairs and as Dale and I took them he seated himself in another, Rose standing behind him.

"My father, Peter Mione," he said, "was in his youth Pietro Mione of the region of Napoli—Naples. There are no small number of men and women with the terrible power of the evil eye in that part of the world, and they are greatly feared; so that my father conceived the idea of assuming the evil eye himself, of becoming *jettatore,* and being himself powerful and feared by all.

"Using the formulæ taught him by the evil *jettatori* he sought, Pietro Mione deliberately made compact with forces of evil that they possess him thenceforth and make his gaze deadly against all whom he turned it against. With that terrible power of the evil eye, Pietro Mione soon became known to all as a *jettatore,* and was feared and avoided by all, since those who offended him he turned his gaze upon.

"Finally those in the region got courage enough to rise against him and Pietro Mione would have been killed had he not fled hastily to America. Here he changed his name to Peter Mione, and living in Boston he met an Italian-American girl who married him without dreaming of his deadly power. In little more than a week she was stricken down by her husband's evil eye! Refusing to meet his eyes again, she lingered weakly until a son was born to her, then died.

"That son was me, Joseph Mione, and I had from birth the same power of the evil eye as my father, Peter Mione. My father was amused rather than horrified by this. He had acquired a certain amount of money by then, but every so often had to move to a different town, since sooner or later those about him discovered that Peter Mione had the evil eye and was striking down some of them with it.

"I grew up living only with my father. I never suspected that he, much less I, had the evil eye, since those who possess the power are of course not affected by it in another. In one town where I went to school I had a chum, a little boy named Antonio. We were close friends, and once when other boys shouted after me that I was an evil-eyed son of an evil-eyed father, Antonio fought them. But soon after Antonio sickened and died. I did not dream that it was I who had stricken him.

"Young people avoided me as I grew older, whispering of the evil eye of Peter Mione and his son. I thought all this talk of the evil eye of my father was mere slander. It seemed to spring up anew in every town we moved to. Then at last I found out the truth.

"We had moved to Providence and there I met a girl, beautiful, wonderful. I was twenty, and I courted and won her. We were married, and my father laughed as though at some great joke. My bride said she did not like him. She sickened swiftly. I thought it was because she expected a child, but no, her weakness grew. She died as the child, my daughter Rose, was born. And in dying she whispered to me that it was the evil eye of myself and of my father that killed her!

"I WAS stupefied. I remembered how my father had always been reputed to have the evil eye, and how it was sup-

posed to be hereditary. Had I, then, the evil eye also? Frantically I examined my eyes in a mirror. I seemed to see dark forces deep within them, forces not of me that yet possessed me and worked through my gaze.

"I remembered little Antonio, how he had fought for me and yet had died. I remembered others who had been intimate with me for a time and who had died, how my father had been charged with deaths, and how my wife had died, slain by me who loved her more than anything else on earth! Yes, and remembered how my father laughed when I married!

"I ran to my father, cried the question to him, and he answered yes! Yes, he said, he had the evil eye and so did I and my baby daughter and all who might come after her. Why not have it, he asked, when he with the evil eye was infinitely more powerful than other men? It was a great weapon, a great power, he boasted. One dared not offend the *jettatore* lest his deadly gaze avenge him. I should be glad I had it, he told me.

"But I shrieked my wife's name and took my father by the throat to kill him. He shook me off and reminded me that if I did kill him the evil eye could never be lifted from me and mine. Only he who had assumed it could lift it from himself and us by revoking his evil compact. I pleaded with him then, on my knees, that he revoke that compact and lift it from us, but he refused. And now I knew that like him I, Joseph Mione, was of the dread evil-eyed!

"Can you know what it means to have the evil eye? Can you know what it means to go forth into the streets and have all shun and avoid you in fear of your deadly gaze? To be afraid to meet the eyes of any person lest you kill them, to see even your loved ones dying from your own looks of love, and be unable to save them? To be of the dread company of the evil-eyed, loathing the power that is yours?

"Such was my life thenceforth. My father gloated in his power of the evil eye—I loathed it. I lived with him and moved with him from town to town. I did so because I still hoped that some day he might relent and revoke his compact, lift this dark power that lay on me and my little daughter Rose as on himself.

"For from Rose's birth I had seen in her eyes the same dark forces that were in mine and my father's. The hereditary power had descended to her as to me! I cursed fate for making it so. I cared for Rose as she grew into childhood and youth, and did not tell her of the black power that was hers.

"I did not permit Rose to go to school, but taught her myself. I allowed her no playmates, though few children would have played with the offspring of *jettatori*. I was determined that though Rose must not know she had the evil eye, neither must there be any innocent victims to her power. My father watched my efforts with cynical amusement, heedless of my pleas to revoke his compact and lift this curse from us.

"So Rose grew up, knowing little outside her home. She heard us called *jettatori* sometimes, but I kept the truth from her. We came finally here to Tauriston, the last town in which we lived, Millport, having become too hot for us due to my father striking down several people with his evil power. And here that which I had feared for Rose happened.

"Rose met by accident young Donald Carlin. He fell in love with her and she loved him. For a few days he came to see her and I saw that already his vitality was diminishing as her deadly gaze worked on him. What was I to do? If I did not tell Rose, she would go through what I had, would see her husband die

from her gaze, would see her child or children born with the dread evil eye! If I did tell, she would know what I had striven so to keep from her, that she was the daughter of a house of the evil eye!

"Then I saw that I must tell, and I did. Rose heard me in horror—heard how her grandfather had brought this curse upon our house, how she as well as he and I had the dread evil eye. She implored him then as I had done to revoke the thing, but he silenced her as he had me. Rose was stunned by the horror of it.

"But she saw now that she must give up young Donald Carlin. She told him not to come again. She could not explain the terrible truth to him. He insisted in coming for a day or two more, then collapsed, stricken by her evil eye. He lay sick for weeks, and Rose dared not visit him, as she would only make him worse. Yet when he recovered somewhat he came again.

"He managed to see Rose for a few moments only; yet that was enough in two or three days more to cause him to collapse again, and lie again for weeks recovering. Yet last night Donald Carlin again came, and Rose went outside with him lest he come in and meet the gaze of my father and myself. Yet she kept her eyes from his to prevent him from being stricken down again.

"Then this morning Donald's father, Henry Carlin, came as you know; and as I told you, it was Peter Mione, my father, who struck him down with his eyes. He should recover, since he met my father's eyes but for a moment. But young Donald Carlin must not come again, for if he does the evil eye will surely kill him!"

5

JOSEPH MIONE's voice ceased. His face was very white and his hands were trembling. Rose laid her hand upon his and he drew her closer.

Doctor Dale's voice was vibrant as he spoke. "It is as I had begun to think, then," he said. "You two, like many other innocent people, suffer from having the power of the evil eye without desiring it."

"We do, and while we do we can not mix and meet with other people," said Mione heavily. "It is a doom upon us."

"But one that can be lifted!" Dale said. "If your father revokes his compact this power will be lifted from both of you as well as from him."

Rose Mione spoke, her voice tragically calm. "He will never do that," she said. "I begged him, but he will stay so until he dies."

"And after he dies," her father added, "he can never revoke this curse and so it can never be lifted from our house. And that is why the house of Mione must end here—with Rose."

Doctor Dale's hazel eyes snapped. "No, Peter Mione must revoke this thing! Even if he refuses to, there are ways by which he may be made to do it."

"What ways?" demanded Joseph Mione. "My father would die under torture rather than lift this evil eye from himself and us."

"I don't mean physical ways," Dale told them. "You know that the power of the evil eye in yourselves and your father is due to evil forces, deliberately invited to possess you by your father's compact?"

They nodded dumbly. "Well," Dale continued, "there are benign forces in the universe as strong as the malign ones. They can be summoned and directed by use of various symbols and methods—such as the symbols Owen and I wear now to protect us.

"These benign forces I could use, I think, to overcome the evil ones that possess your father, and make him revoke his compact even against his own will;

just as hypnotism makes the subject do things against his own will."

"You mean these forces you summoned would work through your gaze," Joseph Mione asked, "as the evil ones do through his and our gaze?"

Doctor Dale nodded. "Yes, and with the forces in my gaze stronger than those in his, I could force him against his will to revoke this curse."

"But how would you do it? How go about it?"

"In this way," Dale answered. "We would take your father by surprize and bind him so that he could not escape or oppose us physically. Then, by the benign forces with which I can empower my gaze, I will undertake to overcome the dark forces that hold him and his own will, and make him revoke his compact with evil. Once he does so he will not be hurt physically, but the evil eye will pass from him and from you two."

Joseph Mione had listened tensely. "If you could do that!" he exclaimed. "Yet if you failed——"

"Father, it is a chance at least to escape this terrible thing," Rose Mione said. "No matter what the risk, let us try it."

"Remember," Doctor Dale put in, "that Peter Mione is an old man. He might die at any time from natural causes and then all hope of lifting this thing from you would be gone."

"You are right—we'll do it!" Joseph Mione declared. "When shall it be?—tonight?"

"Yes, the sooner the better," said Dale quickly. "Your father will go out this evening as last night?"

"Yes, each morning and evening he goes out for a few hours."

"Well, Owen and I will be here this evening before he returns. We'll be waiting here for him when he does."

He stood up, and so did the pale Joseph Mione and his daughter.

"We'll get back now to make preparation—you can expect us at eight tonight."

He took the girl's hand. "You must not expect it to be easy, you and your father. It will be a struggle, but it is for the best."

"I know," she whispered. "We will be waiting for you."

WE LEFT the Mione house at that and went up the street to our car. I saw faces watching us from windows all along the street.

As we passed Domenic Millera's house we saw Millera in its door, but before we could speak he made the swift gesture against the evil eye with his hand toward us, then closed the door.

"These people think us friends of the Miones," Doctor Dale said. "Well, if all goes well tonight they'll have nothing more to fear."

"And if all doesn't go well?" I asked. "Dale, what if Peter Mione and his forces are too strong for you?"

"In that case," said Doctor Dale slowly, "I would fall victim and be stricken myself by the power of his evil eye. But I think I can use forces that will be too much for him.

"I'm going to tell Donald Carlin the whole thing now," he added as we drove back across Tauriston. "He has a right to know."

When we reached the Carlin home we found that Henry Carlin was still sleeping heavily but was no longer in the semi-comatose condition that had been his at first. Donald Carlin had been watching over him and came anxiously toward us as we entered.

"I want to know what happened to Dad," he told Doctor Dale. "He seems to have had an attack of illness just like mine."

"It was the same kind of attack, Donald," Dale said gravely. He went on then

to tell Donald Carlin the whole story of Peter Mione and his family of the evil eye.

Donald was as astonished as I had expected. "And I was stricken by Rose's evil eye? It's incredible!"

"It's only too true," Doctor Dale affirmed. "Even though Rose and her father are innocent, their gaze can kill; and until her grandfather revokes his black compact with evil it will be so."

"And that's why she wouldn't see me!" Donald Carlin exclaimed. "If I had ever known that—— Dale, I'm going to be there with you tonight when you do this!" he said. "I've got to be there with Rose!"

"You can't!" I exclaimed. "To meet the eyes of Rose and her father and grandfather—and no symbol like ours can protect you who have already been a victim——"

"Yet there's a way in which Donald might go, Owen," Doctor Dale said. "If we bind his eyes with a bandage faced with lead-foil—lead being impenetrable to supernatural forces—he can not meet the eyes of the Miones and will be safe from them for the time being."

"Then I'll do that," Donald Carlin told him. "And if you're successful tonight I'll not need to fear Rose's eyes."

"If we're successful, yes," Doctor Dale said. "And if we're not —but we mustn't think of that."

THE hours of that day were busy ones. After making sure that the sleeping Henry Carlin was slowly recovering, and giving Mrs. Grassia directions as to his care, Doctor Dale began preparing for the struggle that night.

He took from his equipment-case a number of unusual objects we had brought, selecting from them two curious silver symbols. These were like the ones we had worn in our lapels, with the eye and seven smaller symbols graven on them. But they were larger, five inches across, and had around the seven small symbols a border of interlaced wheel and crescent designs.

The two symbols had silver loops by which they could be fastened around the wrist like wristlets. Doctor Dale showed how they were to be worn on right and left wrist, and how so worn they summoned to the wearer the tangible and terrific forces by which he meant to overcome Peter Mione.

Dale also made ready a cloth bandage faced with lead-foil for Donald Carlin. When evening came, Henry Carlin still slept and Doctor Dale and young Carlin and I ate dinner silently.

IT WAS nearly eight and already dark when we went out to the car. Donald Carlin drove across Tauriston, halting the car at Dale's direction a block from Cardell Street. We walked on to that street and down to the dark lower end where loomed the dark house of the Miones.

Before knocking, Doctor Dale adjusted the lead-foil bandage around Donald Carlin's eyes. Then he rapped, and at once Joseph Mione answered. For still another time I felt the shock of his eyes against the shield from the silver symbols Dale and I wore in our lapels. Donald Carlin, blindfolded, experienced nothing apparently.

"Your father's not returned yet?" Doctor Dale asked.

"Not yet," said Joseph Mione, deathly white. "But he should be back soon now."

He held the door open and we went inside, Donald Carlin holding to my arm for guidance.

Rose Mione was in the soft-lit room inside, her eyes as she turned toward us again smiting us with that strange tangible force. She gave an exclamation at sight of young Carlin, blindfolded. "Donald!"

"It's all right," Dale told her. "The blindfold protects him."

Donald Carlin groped toward her, held her close. "Rose," he said, his voice low. "I heard all today—all of what you've been through——"

We were all silent for a moment. Then Joseph Mione—"You're going to hide until my father returns?"

"Yes," Doctor Dale answered. He surveyed the room, then indicated the door-hangings of dark cloth separating it from the back rooms. "Owen and I will hide behind these until Peter Mione comes. Donald, you had better go with Rose back into the house."

Rose Mione hesitated, Donald holding her arm. "You're not going to—hurt Grandfather?" she said to Dale.

Doctor Dale shook his head gravely. "I trust not." He showed her the big silver wrist-symbols, attaching them to his wrists so that their disks were flat against the top of the wrist. "With the forces summoned by these symbols I am going to try to make your grandfather revoke his compact of the evil eye, but that will be an ordeal."

She went back into the rear of the house then with Donald Carlin. I could hear their low voices.

"And what do you want me to do?" asked Joseph Mione. He was trembling.

"Just wait in the room here," Doctor Dale told him, "and try to get your father's back to these curtains. Owen and I will do the rest."

Joseph Mione nodded and then Doctor Dale and I took our places behind the door-hangings, invisible to any who entered the room from outside. We made ready in our hands short lengths of thin, hard rope that we had brought with us.

We waited in silence. It was a tense wait that seemed very long. Minutes fled by and still Peter Mione did not return. Out in the room Joseph Mione was becoming increasingly nervous, moving restlessly about. There was no sound from Rose and Donald Carlin in the back rooms.

Then at last a steady step on the sidewalk outside! I knew it for Peter Mione's step even before I heard it stop and the door open. Peering with Dale through the crack between the hangings that concealed us, I saw Peter Mione step inside and close the door.

He was laughing! I had never seen him more evil in appearance, for the mirth in that mask-like face was demoniac. His terrible eyes seemed a little more dilated, the black forces in them stirring near their surface. Unholy exultation was in every line of his face.

"Joseph, I think it will be very long before that fool Millera leads crowds against me again as this morning," he said. "Very long!"

"What do you mean about Millera?" Joseph Mione asked. Peter Mione, flinging hat and coat aside, was walking across the room within a few feet of the hangings behind which Doctor Dale and I waited.

"I mean," said Peter Mione, still gloating, "that Millera will know now what it means to——"

Dale and I sprang out on him. He gave a wild curse, but before he could resist, our ropes were about him and we had thrust him into a chair, in which swiftly we tied him.

Rose Mione, young Donald Carlin with her, came quickly into the room, the girl very white. Peter Mione looked from her and her blindfolded companion to the trembling Joseph Mione, then to Doctor Dale and myself. His gaze became dreadful, smiting at us with a force more than physical.

"So, you plan to trap your father, Jo-

seph!" he hissed. "You and this Dale, this meddler from outside!"

"It's more than a trap, Peter Mione," Doctor Dale told him. "It's going to mean the end tonight of your power of the evil eye!"

"What do you mean?" Mione exclaimed, his fury diabolical.

"I mean that you are going to revoke tonight the compact that gave you that power and lift it from yourself and son and granddaughter!"

Peter Mione's terrible laugh rasped. "You fool, do you think you can make me do that? More than one I've sent to death who tried to overcome me."

"Yet it's going to be done tonight," Doctor Dale returned, his voice steely. He turned a moment to us. "Owen, see that no one enters and that we're not disturbed. That is vital."

Then Dale placed a chair to face that in which Peter Mione sat, and seated himself in it, face to face with Mione.

Doctor Dale extended both hands, making a series of swift gestures almost too fast for the eye to follow. Peter Mione snarled in defiance, yet as he glimpsed the big silver symbols on Dale's wrists his face changed. Doctor Dale placed his hands on his knees, the wrist-symbols upward, and then stared steadily into the eyes of Peter Mione.

There began then the strangest of duels. It was a silent, deadly struggle between the eyes of Doctor Dale and Peter Mione. It was as though their eyes, their gaze, were but the channels by which alien forces far mightier than either of these two men were coming to grips, struggling in supernatural combat.

Tensely, silently, we watched this deadly struggle, Joseph Mione shaking, Rose hiding her face partly against the blindfolded Donald Carlin's shoulder, I beside them. I felt my heart beating rapidly, seemed to feel the room electric with strange forces crowding it. Peter Mione's black eyes were dilated now to a terrible extent, as though the forces working through them were too great for them, while Doctor Dale's hazel eyes flamed with burning, tawny light!

Doctor Dale spoke, his voice low, monotonous. "Revoke your compact!" he said, his eyes gripping the other's.

Peter Mione snarled. His face and hands now were bloodless, and Dale's too were unnaturally white.

"Revoke!" Doctor Dale repeated. Again Mione made no answer.

It was as though time were forgotten by us as the eyes of those two clashed on each other in deadly struggle.

Peter Mione's black force-filled eyes wavered a little. The forces in Dale's flaming gaze were beating too strongly against his.

"He's winning!" I whispered hoarsely to Joseph Mione. "Dale's winning——"

"Revoke!" said Doctor Dale in the same monotone.

"Listen!" said Joseph Mione to me, his eyes startled.

From outside, farther up the street, came a confused roaring sound, growing louder. We sprang to the door and looked out.

Up the street a mad mob of two or three hundred men and women was coming down toward us! At its head, carrying a girl's limp form, walked Domenic Millera. Many in the mob carried flashing lights.

"Revoke!" came again Dale's voice from where he and Peter Mione sat unmoving in their terrific deadlock.

"Death to the *jettatori!*" came the cry of the nearing mob.

"They're down here to kill your father and you!" I cried to Joseph Mione. "Get back in——"

I thrust him behind me as the mob surged down into the street in front of

the Mione house in whose door I stood. I saw now that the girl Domenic Millera carried was his daughter Julia, her form unmoving in his arms, and that his face was insane with passion.

"Millera!" I cried. "What are you doing here with these?"

"We come to kill the *jettatore*—Peter Mione!" he yelled, his voice crazy. "To kill him as Peter Mione killed my Julia this night!"

My heart checked. "Killed your daughter? What do you mean?"

He held up the girl and now I saw her face was the waxen one of the dead. "But now he did it!" Millera cried. "Peter Mione was even more angry with me for leading the crowd here this morning, and as he came down the street to his home tonight he took his revenge on my Julia. Yes, he came up onto my porch when none saw and looked in at her, the gaze of his evil eye again upon hers. And she, weakened already by his evil eye, died almost before she could whisper to us what he had done. So we come now to kill Peter Mione of the evil eye before more die!"

"Death to the *jettatori!*" roared the crowd about him, surging forward.

"Millera, for God's sake get them back!" I cried, but was not even heard in the bellow of the mob. Stones struck about me as they rushed forward. I leapt back, slammed and locked the door.

The mob hammered on the outside. I spun around to where Joseph Mione stood, white and trembling. At the room's center, heedless of all else, Doctor Dale and Peter Mione held still to their terrible duel.

"Get back and lock every door—push furniture against the windows!" I cried to Joseph Mione. "Donald, you help him—if they get in here before Dale wins, everything is lost!"

"Revoke!" came Doctor Dale's steady command to Peter Mione, louder now and more forceful.

As Joseph Mione ran back to lock and bar the doors and windows of the rear of the house, Donald Carlin, still blindfolded, and Rose Mione hastening to help him, I shoved the room's furniture against the windows and doors as rapidly as possible. Already the smash and tinkle of glass sounded as stones shattered windows.

"Death to the *jettatori*—death to Peter Mione!" came the cry.

At the room's center Doctor Dale and Peter Mione still faced each other. Dale's eyes were as terrible now as Mione's, and seemed beating the other's down. The room was pregnant with mighty forces.

"Revoke!" came Doctor Dale's inexorable command again.

"Kill the evil-eyed—kill Peter Mione as he killed my son!" screamed the Safetta woman outside.

"Death to the *jettatore!*" came Millera's mad cry.

The door split beneath blows and now the mob was pounding upon the heavy cabinet I had shoved against it. I held against the cabinet.

"Carlin, they're breaking in here!" I yelled. Donald Carlin, blindfolded still, stumbled from the house's rear, where was pounding and smashing too, with Joseph Mione and Rose.

"We can't hold them out much longer!" Donald panted as he and Joseph Mione pushed with me to hold the cabinet against the door.

"We've got to!" I cried. "Dale is winning, but if they kill Peter Mione now it means all chance of lifting the curse of the evil eye is gone!"

The door and cabinet crashed further inward despite our efforts to hold it. The mob bellowed triumphantly——

Doctor Dale and Peter Mione now had

risen from their chairs, eyes still holding each other, Mione's wrinkled face now ghastly as with gaze still riveted to Dale's force-flaming eyes he struggled. He seemed gasping for breath.

The mob was breaking through! They were pushing us bodily back with the cabinet from the door, Millera's insane cry spurring them on, their shouts a confused roar in my ears. Rose Mione screamed and I heard over her scream the thunder of Doctor Dale's command.

"Revoke!"

The maddened mob burst in, Domenic Millera foremost among them with his daughter's limp body still in his arms.

They halted, transfixed by the sight of Peter Mione staggering at the room's center, face ghastly and contorted as he clutched the air, his eyes riveted on Doctor Dale's.

"I revoke!" screamed Peter Mione, then toppled sidewise in a heap.

Millera and his followers stared, petrified.

Doctor Dale, staggering himself, steadied and bent over Peter Mione. The face he turned up was lifeless, black eyes wide in death.

He turned to Joseph and Rose Mione. In their eyes was no longer that deep stirring of black forces, that outthrust of tangible evil force! Their eyes were cleansed, normal. Unbelievingly, father and daughter stared into each other's eyes.

Doctor Dale turned to Domenic Millera and those behind him. "Peter Mione is dead and you heard him revoke his power of the evil eye before he died," he told them. "The evil eye is gone now from these two as from him."

Millera, like a man in a dream, nodded. "It is so," he said. Then as his eyes fell on the limp body in his arms, a sob of utter human wo came from him. "My Julia!"

He stumbled out, the mob withdrawing with him, slowly, awed.

Doctor Dale turned. Donald Carlin had ripped the bandage from his eyes and they sought Rose Mione's as he held her.

"Rose," he faltered. "Rose——"

"Donald, it's gone — you can look now!" she said. Then she was weeping. Donald held her close. Joseph Mione was still bemazed.

"It is gone, yes," Doctor Dale said, "the curse of the evil eye that Peter Mione brought on himself and his. The house of Mione can go on but the house of the evil eye is—ended."

The Telephone in the Library

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

A grim story of a life that was snuffed out before its appointed time, and a mysterious voice that whispered over the wires in the midnight hours

"AND furthermore," said Miss Elida Hope from the first landing, "if you think it was a pleasure to live with Andrew, you're badly mistaken." She went on up the stairs, drawing off her gloves and talking angrily to herself.

Cornelius Hope watched her out of sight from the hall below. Then he shrugged his shoulders and hooked his cane and hat to the hall tree. He removed his ulster slowly, brushed vaguely at several imaginary hairs, and slipped it on the hanger. Elida should have been a man, he thought.

A door slammed upstairs, and in a moment Elida appeared at the head of the stairs. Seeing her brother below, she began anew. "You've no idea how that man tired me. Eternally fussing about and complaining all day long. Brother or no brother, Cornelius, my feelings are the same. If you'd lived with him as long as I have, you'd look at this thing just as I do. And you seem shocked because I don't show the proper respect and sorrow!"

Cornelius said, "My dear Elida, really, I must protest. You put too much emphasis on a chance remark."

"I never misplace emphasis, Cornelius," said his sister firmly. She arrived at the bottom of the stairs and stood confronting him, a tall angular form dressed in a long black satin gown that swept the floor. "If I hadn't spoken my mind about this thing to make my position clear, I know that you'd have gone home thinking how shocking Elida was, and I could just picture you saying to Helen, 'My dear, I don't think Elida showed at all the proper love for our brother,' and that catty wife of yours agreeing with every word, and liking it. No, not another word, Cornelius." She stopped the unuttered protest on his lips and swept past him.

Cornelius followed her back speculatively with his gaze. As she vanished between the portieres into the parlor, he began to follow her. He heard a bell sound violently in the rear of the house and guessed that his sister had pulled the bell-rope. His guess was confirmed when he entered the parlor, for already Elida's maid had answered the ring. Been waiting, thought Cornelius; she knows Elida.

"Lunch ready?"

"Yes, Miss Elida."

"Good. Then serve it immediately. This room will do. There will be just the two of us."

ELIDA turned to her brother, who had just settled himself comfortably in an old-fashioned leather chair. "I don't want you to think, Cornelius, that I fail to appreciate the fact that Andrew's our brother, and that he's dead; I have the proper respect and sorrow. But I'm not sorry that Andrew is gone from this house. I should feel precisely the same were he visiting someone indefinitely. I'm not happy to know that he's dead, but happy that he's gone."

Cornelius nodded. "There's no need of going further with this, Elida," he said wearily. "I understand perfectly. Please

"She screamed once: then the hands closed about her neck."

let's not have any more discussion on this point."

"Very well," snapped Elida, with the air of having achieved a signal victory.

The maid came into the room carrying a light luncheon on a tray. She wheeled out a tea-table and began to arrange the dishes.

Elida sat silent until she had finished and was ready to go. Then she said, "We're not to be disturbed, Stella."

"Yes, Miss Elida."

Elida moved up to the table and Cornelius followed suit.

"Now that we're alone," she said, as soon as Cornelius had got comfortably established, "I think it the proper time to go into one or two little matters in which we have a mutual interest."

Cornelius sighed. "Can't we postpone this discussion until after lunch? Really, you do think of the most impossible times to take up these things."

His sister heard him through. Then

she said, "We can't postpone it. Mr. Sloan is coming in a very short time to read Andrew's will."

The maid came into the room abruptly, and Elida's features became rigid. "What is it, Stella? Didn't you understand we were not to be disturbed?"

"Yes, Miss Elida; I'm sorry, but a long distance call has just been put through for Mr. Hope, and I thought perhaps it might be important; so I came right in."

Elida said, "Mmmph."

Cornelius said, "Good girl, Stella. That will be Helen," he went on, turning to his sister. "I felt sure she'd call today."

"The telephone in the library is closer than the one in the rear hall; take the call there," said Elida.

CORNELIUS rose and left the room hurriedly, Elida looking after him in disapproval. When he returned, she had consumed a sandwich and a cup of tea.

"Did she have anything to say?" she asked.

"Nothing much," said Cornelius. "Just small talk."

Elida looked at him shrewdly to see whether he might be hiding something; deciding that he was not, she prepared to open the subject of what Andrew had left.

Cornelius said suddenly, "You know, Elida, I had the most peculiar feeling in that library."

Elida said, "That was Andrew's favorite room. I think it's unhealthy. He was always so afraid that air would ruin his precious books." She grimaced at the memory.

Cornelius nodded. "Andrew's room, was it? Well, all the time I was at the telephone I had the distinct sensation of having Andrew at my elbow. Really, it was just as vivid as could be."

Elida froze him with a glance. She got up abruptly and pulled the bell-cord. Before she had regained her seat, Stella popped into the room.

"What is it, Miss Elida?"

"Has my brother ordered any wine up to his room?"

"No, Miss Elida."

"Very well; you may go." She turned to her brother and said icily, "Your senses are diseased, Cornelius."

He grunted. "I can't help wondering," he said, "which of you had it the hardest. I'm beginning to think that a good deal might be said for Andrew."

Elida raised her eyebrows and compressed her lips, but she said nothing.

Cornelius said, "You mentioned certain matters——"

Elida snapped, "They're of minor importance."

"But, you said——"

"We'll take them up later, if at all."

Cornelius shrugged. "Oh, very well."

Elida opened her lips to say something, but thought better of it, and closed them again.

Soft footsteps came down the hall, and in a moment the maid looked apologetically into the room. "I'm very sorry, Miss Elida, but there's another call for Mr. Hope."

Cornelius was surprized. "Now who can that be?" he wondered.

His sister wondered with him, less openly. "Probably your wife again," she said casually.

The maid said, "It's not a long distance call this time, Miss Elida."

Cornelius got up hastily and left the room. When he got back, his sister was standing at the window.

"I'm sorry, Elida," he said, "but I'm called away."

Elida turned. "Oh, but the lawyer's coming, Cornelius," she protested. "You can't go now."

"I'm afraid I'll have to. It's a very im-

portant matter. I promise to be back before Mr. Sloan comes."

Elida made a gesture of assent. "Oh, very well, Cornelius."

Cornelius Hope left the house wondering why Mr. Sloan had called him and asked to see him, "to speak privately," as the lawyer put it, with him.

WHEN Cornelius stepped into the lawyer's office, Mr. Sloan sat behind an enormous desk, rustling papers through his long thin fingers.

"Ah, Mr. Hope," he said, picking up a paper and putting it down. "Sit down, please."

He shuffled the papers together and put them aside. Then he took off his glasses, looked at them absently for a moment, and returned them to his nose. Mr. Sloan was a mild little man with a mop of white hair and rather large glasses which made him look owlish. He had fluttery hands, and wore clothes which were a size too large for him. He did not look like a lawyer, and Cornelius Hope was somewhat disappointed. He turned at last to Cornelius.

"No doubt this will seem somewhat of an irregular proceeding to you, Mr. Hope," he said. "As a matter of fact, it *is* irregular. But there's a very delicate matter which I could not very well bring up in your sister's presence, since she is largely and vitally concerned."

"Something about the will?" Cornelius ventured.

"Not directly, no."

Mr. Sloan paused and looked distressed. He went on presently, in a softer voice.

"I confess I would much rather not say a word of this, but I feel it my duty to do so, and it was your late brother's express wish that I pass his suspicion on to you."

"What do you mean — 'suspicion'? There wasn't anything wrong, was there?"

"Allow me to tell it in my own way, Mr. Hope."

Cornelius nodded, and the lawyer went on.

"As you no doubt know, the relations between your brother and sister were extremely strained."

"Judging from what Elida has said, I should guess that you're putting it rather mildly, Mr. Sloan."

"Exactly, exactly." The little man beamed his pleasure at being thus anticipated. He went on, wagging his head. Yes, they were like cat and dog, Mr. Hope, to use an old figure. Now, I want you to understand that I don't take sides in this matter, though I'm acting chiefly for your brother, and only incidentally for your sister." He paused and coughed significantly. "Well, Mr. Hope, realizing as I did the strained relations existing between Mr. Andrew and Miss Elida, you can imagine my astonishment when your brother came to me early one morning about a year ago and told me that he believed his sister was slowly and systematically poisoning him!"

Cornelius jerked his head up with such vehemence that the lawyer started backward. "Impossible!" exclaimed Cornelius.

The lawyer nodded. "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, Mr. Hope, but it was your brother's desire that you should know in the event of his death."

"But the doctor certified his death—everything was all right!"

"Please, Mr. Hope; you anticipate me. I am telling you only what your brother told me; I'm not pretending to give any view of my own. If the doctor certified his death, as he did, I feel sure that Andrew was in error."

"Very well. Go on, please."

"Your brother seemed quite agitated,

but when I asked him what he proposed to do, he replied, 'Nothing!' Naturally, I protested. I pointed out to him that it was his duty both to himself and to his sister to verify or invalidate such a suspicion, but I could not move him. It is my belief that your brother died firmly convinced that Miss Elida had poisoned him!"

Cornelius fingered his hat nervously. "But surely," he said at last, "surely he can't have thought that. Andrew was apoplectic, and it was apoplexy that carried him off."

Mr. Sloan nodded. "Yes, so the doctor said, and so I believe. Did your sister tell you how he died?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Sloan?"

"Perhaps I should have said, 'where he died, under what conditions'."

"Elida said nothing to me."

"Your brother was found dead in the library, near midnight. He was found through the suspicion of a telephone operator. Andrew had apparently just called a number when he had the stroke that killed him. The operator sent a policeman to the house. The policeman and Elida together found Andrew dead. In one hand he still held the telephone—one of these new cradle-sets; in the other he had what the policeman described as a book on poisons."

"Ah!" said Cornelius sharply.

"I got there a few moments later," added Mr. Sloan.

"You? But how did you know so quickly?"

"The number Andrew called was mine."

For a moment Cornelius hesitated, his face losing some of its color. "Then," he said excitedly, "Andrew had discovered something, and he was going to tell you about it!"

"There's no way of knowing that."

"The book on poisons, then. Can you tell me its name?"

"No," said Mr. Sloan, "I can't. In the excitement that prevailed immediately after the discovery of Andrew's death, the book vanished. The policeman had seen it, however, and mentioned it to me. He lost interest as soon as the doctor pronounced Andrew's death due to natural causes."

"That puts a very serious face on the matter."

"Not at all, Mr. Hope. Andrew's suspicions may have been entirely unfounded, as he himself admitted to me only a few weeks before his death."

"But perhaps he had discovered something. Why, he might even have been calling you to change his will!"

"I don't think so," said the lawyer firmly.

"Why are you so positive?"

"Because I know that your brother would not have changed his will, no matter what happened. We talked it over one afternoon some time after he first voiced his fears to me. Except for a few small bequests, everything goes to Miss Elida."

Cornelius nodded. "Well, that's as it should be," he said. "I expected nothing, since I have provided amply for myself and for my family. But if Elida *did* . . . No, I don't believe it; not for an instant!"

"Nor do I, Mr. Hope. However, your brother did, and he constantly insisted that if he had been poisoned, we should all know, for Elida would never live to enjoy her inheritance."

"Murder will out—is that it?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Sloan. "Your brother was a queer man, Mr. Hope. He was a church-going man, and your sister was not. I think he believed pretty strongly in ultimate justice; we of the law have no such faith." He pulled out

a watch. "We'd better be getting on to the house now, I think. I'm a bit late as it is."

"My cab is outside," offered Cornelius.

Mr. Sloan shook his head. "It would never do for us to come together, Mr. Hope. Your sister's curiosity would leave you no rest if she saw us together."

Cornelius nodded. "Quite right." He descended to the street with the lawyer. There they parted.

MISS ELIDA HOPE was markedly cheerful after the lawyer had gone that afternoon. "I must admit," she said, "that I did not expect Andrew to leave so much to me."

"Ah, well, there was no one else to leave it to, Elida. I didn't need it, as Andrew knew, and while you aren't exactly in need either, no doubt you can use what he's left you."

Cornelius gave his attention to the day's paper, but he was not reading. He was turning over and over in his mind what Mr. Sloan had said to him that afternoon. Presently he looked up and asked, "By the way, Elida, do you know whether there's any book on poisons in the library?"

"I don't think so," said his sister. "Why?" Her face was impassive.

"I wanted to look up the effects of certain poisons, arsenic, for instance, and thought Andrew might have such a book."

Elida's sharp eyes fixed him steadily from above *The Delineator*. "No," she said, "I'm quite sure Andrew never had such a book."

"You don't happen to have such a book yourself, Elida?"

His sister's eyes widened. She lowered her magazine abruptly and said, "Cornelius, are you ill?"

He shook his head impatiently. "Of course not, but——"

"What in the name of common sense would I have such a book for? I declare, Cornelius, you've been acting very strangely since the funeral."

Cornelius blushed. "It's not important, Elida. I can look it up in the public library at home."

Elida went on, "First you feel Andrew at your elbow and now you want to read up on poisons and think I might have such a book in my possession. Really, Cornelius, I think Andrew's death has affected you."

Cornelius grunted uncomfortably and retired behind his newspaper. Elida got up abruptly and said, "I'm going to bed. Good night, Cornelius."

"Good night," mumbled Cornelius.

Miss Elida Hope did not go directly to bed. She went to her room and took from its hiding-place a rather old-looking book in brown covers. This she tucked under her arm, and then she went down the back stairs to the furnace, into which the book was presently dropped. The title of the book was *The History and Secrets of Poisons*.

This task performed, Elida retired to her room, where she got into bed and read. She was still reading when Cornelius went to bed.

IN THE night Elida was awakened by the skirling of the telephone bell near her bed. The bell was ringing very faintly, and Elida's first thought when she was fully awake was that she would have to have that bell looked after. Then she took the instrument from its cradle and said, "Hello." There was no answer. She said "Hello" again.

There broke into her growing exasperation a faint sound from the receiver. It was a voice, but it was so broken and far away that Elida could not under-

stand what it was saying. She pulled on the bed-lamp.

"Please speak louder," she said. "I can't hear you."

The sound on the wire increased, but it was not clearer.

"Just a moment," she put in; "I'll try to get central."

Without waiting for any sound from the instrument, she gave her attention to the cradle and tried to get the central. There was no answer. She tried again, but still no answer came through. Then, in irritation, she returned the telephone to the cradle. Immediately the bell began to ring.

This time the voice was a little clearer. "Elida," it said, and again, "Elida."

"Yes," said Elida. "What is it?"

"Page 77, paragraph three." That was all. There was a distant click, as if the connection had been severed.

Elida looked at the instrument as if it had itself imparted this perplexing message to her. Then she tried again to get central, hoping to trace the call and discover who had sent this cryptic line. But there was no response of any kind. She put out the bed-lamp and pulled the covers up about her, firmly convinced that in the morning the telephone company would have some explaining to do.

She was almost asleep when she remembered that Andrew had been found with the book opened to page 77. But no one except that stupid policeman had seen the book!

DAWN found Miss Elida Hope looking rather drawn, so much so, in fact, that Cornelius remarked on it at once.

"I've had a bad night," said Elida. "Hardly slept at all."

Cornelius began to commiserate her, but she cut him short. Just before breakfast she said, "I had a very trying time with the telephone last night. I simply couldn't get central, and nothing exasperates me more, Cornelius. The company will hear about it, mark my word."

The maid, who had been an unconscious listener, blushed suddenly and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, Miss Elida, but I forgot to tell you that the telephone company called yesterday to let us know that they were cutting our connection from nine last night to five this morning because they were working on a cable near here."

Elida stared at her. At last she managed to say, "Cut the connection, Stella? Are you sure?"

"Yes, Miss Elida."

Elida was agitated. "But that can't be. Someone called me last night between twelve and one."

The maid became confused. "I couldn't get central after nine last night," she ventured.

Elida dabbed at her lips with her handkerchief. Her eyes, as she continued to stare at Stella, were far away. Abruptly, she got up and left the table at which she had been sitting. She did not eat breakfast.

Nor did Elida appear for lunch, much to Cornelius's wonder. It was not until late afternoon that Cornelius saw his sister again. She was coming down the stairs and he was going up. They met on the first landing.

"That blasted library gives me the shivers," said Cornelius. "Honestly, Elida, there's something funny about that room. It's all damp and moldy. And you don't have to look at me as if I'd taken leave of my senses, because I know very well what I'm saying. I've felt it from the first."

Elida disregarded his words entirely. Instead of the sarcasm which he expect-

ed, she said, "When do you plan on leaving, Cornelius?"

He was visibly taken aback. "Why, I can go any time you want me to, if you've made plans," he said. "Tomorrow, or even tonight."

"Tomorrow, then," she said. "I don't want to appear inhospitable, Cornelius, but I'm beginning to feel run down, and I think an immediate vacation away from this house would do me good."

Cornelius nodded. "Quite right. You *are* looking rather peaked, Elida. Why not come down and spend some time with Helen and the children?"

Elida smiled bleakly. "That wouldn't be a vacation," she said. Then she went on down the stairs, leaving him to look after her.

At dinner that night Elida ate sparingly indeed. Cornelius could not help noticing.

"Really, Elida," he said, "I feel rather guilty for not having thought of how the strain of the funeral might tell on you."

"What train are you taking tomorrow?" Elida asked.

Her brother said, "I think the nine-forty. I've already wired Helen."

The portieres at the hall entrance were brushed aside and Stella looked into the room. "Miss Elida," she said, "the telephone company's just called to say that the service will be shut off again tonight from ten to five."

Elida nodded. "Very well, Stella."

The maid withdrew, and Elida turned once more to her brother. "I'm going to bed earlier than usual tonight, Cornelius."

"Oh, not already, Elida," he protested.

"No, I shall pack first. But I shall go to bed directly I have finished. Good night, Cornelius."

She left the room with nervous eagerness.

Elida did not go to bed. She sat in the darkness of her room with a hundred perplexing thoughts crowding her mind. That book, now? Who could have telephoned her about it? Could that policeman have mentioned it to Sloan? Yes, that must be it. And somehow Sloan had told Cornelius, and then it was Cornelius who had called from the library. Yes, it must have been he. But how could anyone dream of anything wrong? And how could anyone telephone when the connection had been cut?

Elida had turned these thoughts over in her mind throughout the entire day, and it became increasingly evident that there was no solution to the riddle of the telephone call.

She went to bed at last, a little afraid.

In the night she was awakened. She knew intuitively what it was, even before she actually heard the telephone bell. How faintly it rang!

She jerked on the bed-lamp and drew herself up to a sitting posture in the bed. She hesitated to take the instrument from its cradle. Her breathing, she noticed, was heavy and irregular. Impulsively she picked up the telephone.

"Hello," she said in a voice she scarcely recognized as her own.

The voice at the other end of the wire was clearer, but it sounded as far away as ever. "Elida," it said, "is that you?"

Elida said, "Yes. Who are you? What do you want?"

"Don't you know, Elida?"

How familiar that voice was! Oh, it must be Cornelius, calling from the library. She glanced hastily at the clock on the bureau; it was twenty minutes past eleven. The voice at her ear was insistent, "Page 77, paragraph three."

Elida could say nothing, and the voice went on: "'. . . if administered irregularly over this period, it will have a weakening effect, and will eventually cause death if associated with another disease . . .'"

Elida dropped the instrument to the pillow as if it had got suddenly unbearably hot. Not even the policeman could know that! He had not read that much, would not remember. There was only . . . only . . . Elida Hope's face went suddenly haggard. Though it was impossible, someone was speaking to her from the library—it must be from there—telling her something only a dead man could know, reading from a book that had been burned, reading what *he* had been reading when he died.

She turned the covers back suddenly. The voice was still talking; it could not know that Elida was no longer listening. Quickly she went to the closet, where she found Andrew's silver-topped cane, a good weapon. Stifling the fear that yawned for her, she took up an electric candle and went from her room.

She crept silently down the stairs to the library. Through the closed double doors she could hear that uncanny voice. Then she opened the doors and slipped through, holding the candle high and gripping the cane tightly in her hand. Her gaze fixed itself upon the seat of the chair in which Andrew had been found. Someone was sitting there, a dark shapeless shadow. Even as she looked, she saw the telephone drift slowly downward toward its cradle, held by a shadowy hand without substance. A voice spoke to her from the chair, saying, "Elida." Then the figure in the chair stood up and came swiftly toward her.

For a moment Elida Hope was conscious of two frightful eyes, terrible with hatred, moving toward her out of the darkness of the library. Then she struck blindly with the cane. A face took form in the darkness, and two hands reached upward. Elida screamed once; then the hands found her, closed about her neck, choking her. The electric candle and the cane clattered to the floor together.

CORNELIUS heard the scream from below, and after it the sound of something falling. He jumped quickly from bed, groped in the darkness for his dressing-gown, and ran from his room. A faint glow from the partly open library doors could be seen from the stairs. As he came nearer, he saw that the glow came from an electric candle which lay on its side close to the door just inside the library. At almost the same instant he saw a bare foot, and then another—Elida, crumpled on the floor near the table.

Cornelius found the switch and the lights went up. He came to his knees beside his sister, feeling for her heartbeats. There was nothing, no movement whatever; Elida was dead. As he knelt there, staring stupidly down, he saw that his sister had been strangled. He bent forward.

Fingerprints looked up at him from the white of Elida's throat. They were clear and unmistakable, but even as he looked, he saw that they were fading away, together with the discoloration of Elida's skin. Then his eye was caught by the print of the right thumb. It was not complete, was not clear, like those others. Down the center of the print ran a long blank space almost a quarter of an inch wide, and fully an inch long.

Cornelius came suddenly to his feet and reached for the telephone. But his hand paused in midair. In bending over, he had seen the same prints on the telephone. But these were not fading. Must not touch them, he thought unconscious-

ly. Once more his eye was caught and held by the imperfect print of the right thumb.

Then abruptly his memory carried him swiftly back to his youth—he and Andrew playing together—the gash in Andrew's right thumb—and the resulting scar that had never changed, *the scar that had always remained a little patch of smooth skin!*

Ballad of the Wolf

By HENRY KUTTNER

The Baron came down to his torture vault, and his steward led the way,
And the steward was smiling an evil smile for the work he had done that day;
For there in the vault the soldier Karl lay bound to the torture rack;
And never again across the snow will the werewolf lead the pack!

The yell of the beast was heard by night, the cry of a lost soul's wo;
Shadows raced through the forest gloom, and blood was red on the snow;
And all men knew at the head of the pack a giant werewolf ran,
For he feared the cross and the green wolfbane, and his eyes were the eyes of a man.

Into the vault to the fettered man came Helga, the Baron's ward,
And the steward chuckled beneath his breath as he leaned on his naked sword;
The jealous rage of a weakling serf is a thing for the strong to fear,
And the steward had sharpened his brooding hate like the point of a poisoned spear.

The Baron looked into Helga's eyes, and he read aright their plea,
And he bade his vassals cut the cords and set the soldier free;
They bent their heads as their master spoke, but they cared not what he said,
For they did not serve the Baron now, but were thralls of an age-old dread.

The Baron fingered his jeweled sword as he stared at the sullen crew;
He looked to left, and he looked to right, and at last the Baron knew
(As all men learn) that he could not break the web that the gray Norns spin . . .
And swiftly he buckled about his waist a girdle of human skin!

There was blood and steel in the torture vault, and the terror of Judgment Day;
The steward fell with a dying shriek and his throat torn half away;
The Baron's ward has slashed the cords and freed her love from the rack;
And never again across the snow will the werewolf lead the pack!

The Grinning Ghoul

By ROBERT BLOCH

A story of stark horror in the subterranean depths beneath the tomb

FATE plays strange tricks on one, doesn't it? Six months ago I was a well-known and moderately successful practising psychiatrist; today I am an inmate of a sanatorium for mental cases. In my capacity of alienist and physician I have often committed patients to the selfsame institution in which I myself am now confined, and today—irony of ironies!—I find myself their brother in misfortune.

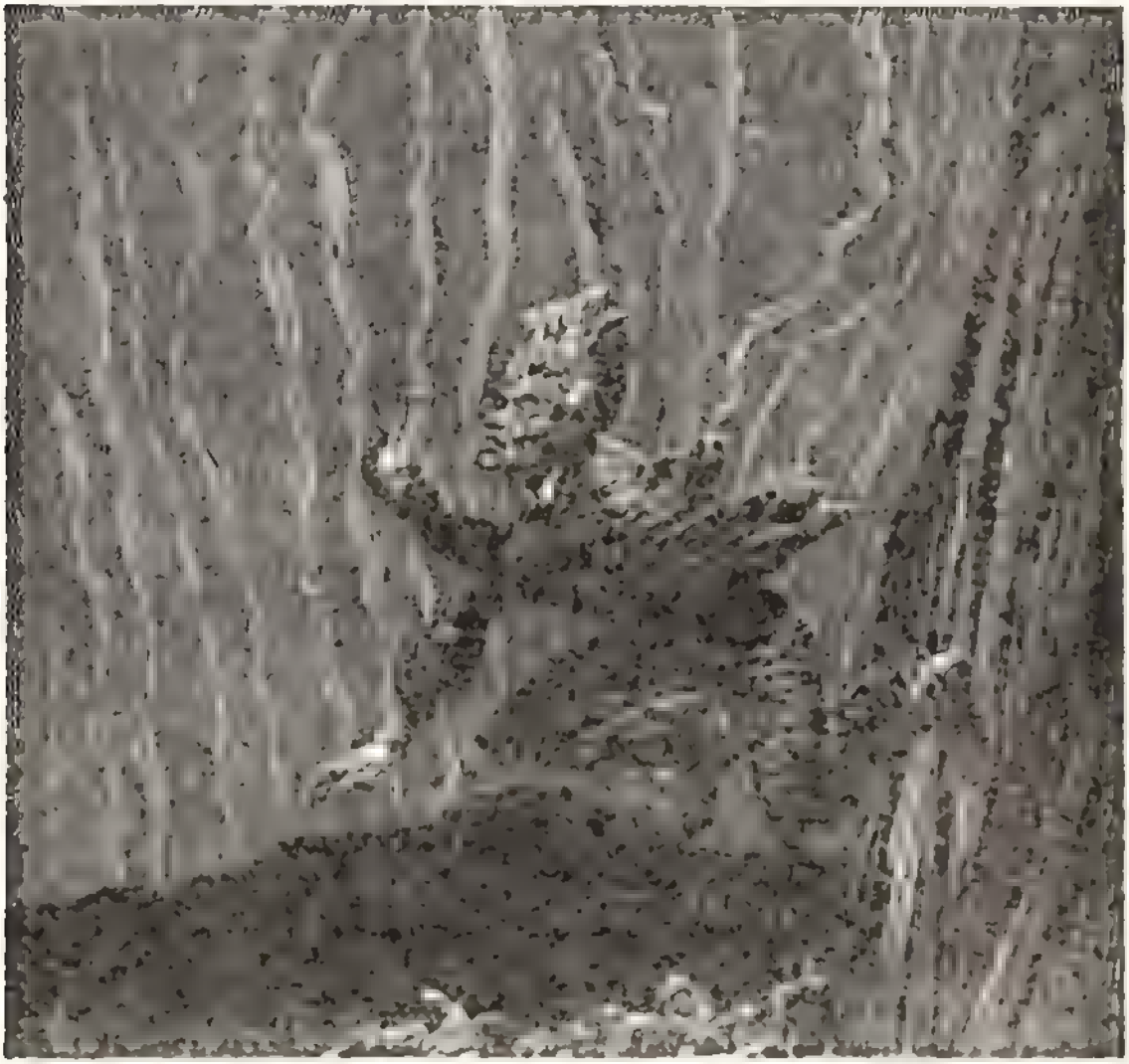
And yet I am not really mad. They sent me here because I chose to tell the truth, and it was not the kind of truth men dare to reveal or recognize. I acknowledge that my part in the matter led me to suffer a severe nervous break-down, but it did not derange me. My story is true; I swear to it—but they will not believe. Of course I really have no substantial proof to offer; I have never seen Professor Chaupin since that eventful night last August, and my subsequent investigations failed to substantiate his claim to a post at Newberry College. This, however, only testifies to the validity of my statement; a statement which sent me to shameful confinement, to a living death which I abhor.

There is one other concrete proof which I could give if I dared, but that would be too terrible. I must not lead them to the exact spot in that nameless cemetery and point out the passage that yawns beneath that tomb. It is better that I should suffer alone, that the world at large be spared the knowledge that destroys sanity. Yet it is hard for me to live like this, and to the drabness of my days my nighted dreams add endless torment. That is why I choose to set down this account—perhaps the unfolding of my story will serve somehow to ease the painful burden of my memory.

The affair began one day last August, at my downtown office. It had been a dull vigil that morning, and the long, hot afternoon was nearly over when the nurse ushered in the first patient. It was a gentleman who had never consulted me heretofore; a man who gave his name as Professor Alexander Chaupin, of Newberry College. He spoke sibilantly, with a peculiar foreign intonation which led me to assume that he was not a native of this country. I requested him to be seated, and tried to appraise him quickly as he complied with my invitation.

He was tall and thin. His hair was startlingly white, almost platinum; yet his general physique and appearance were that of a man of forty. His green, unwavering eyes were deeply set in a pale, protruding forehead and were surmounted by long, jet-black brows. The nose was large, with sensual nostrils, but his lips were thin—a physical contradiction which I immediately noticed. The lean hands resting on the table were exceedingly small, with long, tapering fingers terminating in lengthy nails—probably cultivated for use in reading and reference work, I decided. His supple posture was akin to that of a panther in repose; he had the foreigner's ease and graceful manner. In the sunlight I was able to

"As he watched that demon processional he would suddenly lose his footing and be precipitated into the charnel swarm below."



observe his face, and I discovered his entire countenance to be covered with a network of tiny wrinkles. I noted, too, the peculiar pallor of his skin, which indicated some dermatological disturbance. But by far the queerest thing about him was his unusual mode of dress. His clothes, while obviously new, were incongruous in two respects; they were formal attire in midday, and they did not seem to fit him. They were curiously large; his striped gray trousers sagged, and his coat bulged strangely. There was dried mud on his patent-leather pumps, and he carried no hat. Obviously he was an eccentric type; a schizophrenic, perhaps, with tendencies toward hypochondria.

I prepared to ask him the routine questions, but he intervened. He was a busy man, he told me, and he would inform me at once of his difficulty, without unnecessary preliminaries or introductions. He settled himself back in his chair, where the sunlight faded into shadow; cleared his throat nervously, and began.

He was troubled, he said, because of

certain things he had heard and read of; they sent him queer dreams, and often caused him spells of uncontrollable melancholia. This was interfering with his work, and yet he could do nothing; for his obsessions were founded on reality. Finally he had decided to come to me for an analysis of his difficulties.

I asked him for an account of his dreams and fancies, half expecting to hear one of the usual image-patterns of the dyspeptic. My assumption, however, proved to be wofully incorrect.

THE most commonplace dream revolved around what I shall call the Misericorde Cemetery, for reasons soon to be apparent. This is a large, ancient, half-abandoned tract in the oldest section of the city, which flourished in the latter part of the past century. The exact location of his nocturnal vision was in and around a certain secluded vault situated in the most dilapidated and archaic portion of the graveyard. The incidents of the dream always occurred at nightfall, beneath a waning and sepulchral moon. Fantastic visions seemed to brood somberly over the midnight landscape, and he spoke vaguely of half-heard voices that seemed to urge him onward as he found himself on the gravel walk that led to the doors of the tomb.

His dreams usually began in this fashion, in the midst of a sound slumber. He would suddenly be walking up a tree-shaded pathway in the night, and enter this tomb by unfastening the rusted chains that barred its portal. Once inside, he seemed to experience no difficulty in guiding his footsteps through the darkness, but with uncanny familiarity would go at once to a certain niche among the biers. He then knelt and pressed a tiny, concealed spring or lever set in the crumbling stones of the floor. A pivot would revolve at the base of the niche and reveal to him a small opening, leading to a moldering cavern below. He spoke here of the nitrous dampness that emanated from this passageway, and the peculiarly nauseous odors of the denser darkness that rose from below. Nevertheless, in his dream he was not repelled, but would immediately enter the chasm and subsequently descend a succession of interminably long staircases cut in stone and earth. Abruptly he would find himself at the bottom.

Then began another lengthy journey through endless labyrinthine caverns and charnel vaults. On and on he wandered, through cave and crypt, tunnel and abyss-burrowed pit; all cloaked in the blackness of immemorial night.

Here he paused in his narrative, and his voice shrank to a shrill, excited whisper.

The horror always came next. He would suddenly emerge into a series of dimly lighted chambers, and as he stood undetected in the shadows, he would see *things*. These were the dwellers that laired beneath; the ghastly spawn that ravened on the dead. They dwelt in nighted caverns lined with human bones and adored the primal gods before altars shaped of skulls. They had tunnels leading to the graves, and burrows still farther below in which they stalked a living prey. These were the grisly night-gaunts that he beheld in dreams; these were ghouls.

He must have seen the look in my face, but he did not falter. His voice, as he continued, became very tense.

He would not attempt to describe these creatures save to say that they were very horrible to look upon, in ways peculiarly obscene. It was easy for him to recognize them for what they were because of certain significant acts they always performed. It was the sight of these acts, more than anything else, which made him

afraid. There are some things that should not even be hinted at to sane minds, and the things that haunted him nightly were among them. In his visions these beings did not accost him and were seemingly unmindful of his presence; they continued to indulge in eldritch feastings in the charnel chambers or join in orgies without a name. But of this he would say no more. His nocturnal flights always ended with the passage of a vast procession of these monstrosities through a cavern still farther beneath—a journey which he would view from a ledge above. Shuddery glimpses into the realms below led him to recall tales of the *Inferno,* and he would cry out in his sleep. As he watched that demon processional from the brink, he would suddenly lose his footing and be precipitated into the charnel swarm below. Here his dream would mercifully end, and he would awake, bathed in icy sweat.

Night after night the visions had come, but this was not the worst of his troubles. His real and besetting fear lay in his knowledge that the visions were true!

HERE I impatiently interrupted, but he insisted upon continuing. Had he not visited the cemetery after the first few dreams and did he not actually find the very vault he had learned to recognize through his dreams? And what about the books? He had been led to institute some extensive research among the private volumes of the college anthropological library. Surely I, as an enlightened and educated man, must admit the veiled and subtle truths so furtively revealed in such tomes as Ludvig Prinn's *Mysteries of the Worm,* or the grotesque *Black Rites* of mystic Luveh-Keraphf, the priest of cryptic Bast. He had made some studies recently in the mad and legendary *Necronomicon* of Abdul Alhazred. I could not refute the arcana behind such things as the banned and infamous Fable of Nyarlathotep, or the Legend of the Elder Saboth.

Here he broke off into a rambling discourse of obscure secret myths, with frequent allusions to such shadows of antique lore as fabled Leng, lightless N'ken, and demon-haunted Nis; spoke too of such blasphemies as the Moon of Yiggurath and the secret parable of Byagoona the Faceless One.

Obviously these incoherent ravings provided the key to his difficulty, and with some argument I succeeded in calming him sufficiently to tell him so.

His readings and research had brought on this attack, I explained. He must not tax his brain with such speculations; these things are dangerous to normal minds. I had read and learned enough of such things to know that such ideas were not meant for men to seek or understand. Besides, he must not take these thoughts too seriously, for after all, these tales were merely allegorical. There are no such things as ghouls and demons—he must see that his dreams could be symbolically interpreted.

He sat in silence for a moment after I concluded. He sighed, then spoke very deliberately. These things were all very well for me to say, but he knew differently. Had he not recognized the place of his dreams?

I interjected a remark about the influence of the sub-conscious mind, but he disregarded my assertion and continued.

Then, he informed me, in a voice that quavered with almost hysterical excitement, he would tell me the worst. He had not yet told me all there was to know about what had occurred when he discovered the vault of his dreams in the cemetery. He had not stopped at this corroboration of his visions. Some nights ago he had gone farther. He had entered the necropolis and found the niche in the

wall; descended the stairs and come upon —*the rest.* How he managed to return he never knew, but on all three of these excursions to the scene he had come back and apparently gone to sleep; the following morning he always was in bed. It was the truth he told me—*he had seen the things!* Now I must help him at once, before he did something rash.

I calmed him with difficulty, meanwhile trying to hit upon a logical and effective method of treatment. He was obviously near to a dangerous mental lesion. There would be no use trying to persuade or convince him that he had dreamed the latter incidents as he had the former; that his nervous system had subjected him to sympathetic hallucinations. I could not hope to make him realize in his present state that the books responsible for his affliction were merely the mad ravings of disordered minds. Obviously the only course remaining open was to humor him, and then concretely demonstrate the utter fallacy of his beliefs.

Therefore, in response to his reiterated pleas, we struck a bargain. He was to undertake to guide me to the place where he claimed his journeys and his dreams had been located, and then prove to me the truth of what he stated. In short, at ten o'clock upon the following evening I agreed to meet him at the graveyard. His pleasure at this arrangement was almost pathetic to see; he smiled upon me like a fond child with a newly bestowed plaything. Obviously he was glad of my decision.

I prescribed a mild sedative to be taken by him that evening, arranged the minor details of our forthcoming tryst and undertaking; then dismissed him until the following night.

His departure left me in a state of great excitement. Here at last was a case worthy of study; a well-educated, seemingly intelligent college professor subject to the ogreish nightmares of a three-year-old infant! I forthwith determined to write a monograph upon the subsequent proceedings. I felt sure that upon the following evening I could conclusively demonstrate the fallacy of his aberration and effect an immediate cure. The night was spent in a frenzy of research and calculated speculation; the following morning in a hasty perusal of the expurgated edition of Comte d'Erlette's *Cultes des Goules.*

Nightfall found me ready for the business at hand. At ten o'clock, clad in hipboots, rough woolen jacket, miner's cap with candle in its brim, I was standing at the cemetery entrance. I felt fully prepared for the coming of Professor Alexander Chaupin; still I must confess to an uneasy and inexplicable nyctaphobia. I did not relish the unpleasant task to follow. Suddenly I found myself anxiously awaiting the arrival of my patient, if only for the sake of companionship.

He came at last, similarly attired, and seemingly in better spirits. Together we scaled the low stone wall surrounding the necropolis. Then he led me across the moonlit garden of graves and into the creeping shadows of a silent grove in the heart of the cemetery. Here the tombstones leered crazily amid the darkness, and the rays of the moon fell not. Some atavistic dread caused me to repress an involuntary shudder as my mind dwelt unbidden upon the fearful trafficking of the worms below. I did not care to let my thoughts rest upon the grave-earth, or the diabolic density of the encircling shadows. I was relieved when Chaupin, unperturbed, led me at last up a long avenue of towering trees to the forbidding portals of the tomb he claimed to have profaned.

2

I CANNOT bear to dwell in detail upon that which followed. I shall not tell you of how we unfastened the chains that barred the tomb, or describe the grim interior of the mausoleum. It is enough for me to state that Chaupin's promise was fulfilled; for he found the niche by the light of the candles we wore upon our miner's caps—found the niche and pressed the secret spot, so that the tunnel from below was revealed. I stood aghast at this unexpected revelation, and a sudden blast of fear stabbed my senses into unnatural tenseness. I must have stood gazing into that sable orifice for many minutes. Neither of us spoke.

For the first time I hesitated. No longer did I have any doubts concerning the validity of the professor's statements. He had proven them beyond the shadow of a doubt. Still, this did not mean that he was wholly sane; it did not cure him of his obsession. I realized, with a repulsion I could not then explain, that my task was far from ended; that we must descend into those nether depths and settle once and for all the questions yet unanswered. I was not prepared to believe Chaupin's incoherent rigmarole about imaginary ghouls; the mere existence of a tomb-passage did not necessarily tend to substantiate his other claim. Perhaps if I went with him to the termination of the pit his mind could be put at rest regarding his singular suspicions. But—and I dreaded to acknowledge the possibility—just supposing there really was some malign, distorted truth in his story of what lurked and bided there below? Some band of refugees, fugitives from the law perchance, who might actually denizen the pit? Perhaps accident had led them to stumble upon this unusual hiding-place. If so, what then?

Still, in this event, something told me that we would have to go on and see for ourselves. To this inward prompting, Chaupin added his vocal pleas. Let him show me the truth, he said, and I could no longer doubt. After that I would believe, and with belief alone could I help. He was begging me to go on, but if I refused he would have to take recourse in a police investigation of the place.

It was this last point that determined me. I could not afford to see my name mixed up in a mess that involved such spectacular opportunities for scandal. If the man were mad, I could take care of myself. If not—well, we would soon see. Accordingly I gave reluctant consent to proceeding, then stepped aside for him to lead the way.

The opening gaped like the mouth of a mythic monster. Down we went; down a serpentine, slanting stairway in the damp stone passage that was chiseled out of solid rock. The tunnel was hot and humid, and upon the air was the odor of putrefying life. It was like a journey through the most fantastic realms of nightmare—a journey that led to unknown crypts beneath the corpse-earth. Here were things secret to all but the worms, and as we continued I began to wish that they might remain so. I was actually becoming panicky, though Chaupin seemed oddly calm.

Several factors contributed to my growing unease. I did not like the stealthy rats that chittered ceaselessly from countless tiny burrows that lined the second spiral of the passage. An army of them swarmed the stairs; all sleek and fat and bloated. I began to conceive some peculiar notions as to the cause of that bloating, and the probable sources of their nocturnal nourishment. Then, too, I noticed that Chaupin seemed to know the way quite well; and if it were true that he had been here before, then what about the rest of his story?

My eyes, glancing down the stairs, received still another shock. There was no dust on the steps! They looked as if they were constantly *in use!* For a moment my mind refused to comprehend the import of this discovery, but when at last it burst full-blown upon my brain I felt suddenly stunned. I did not dare to look again, lest my ready imagination conjure up the probable image of what might ascend that stairway from below.

Hastily dissembling my childish dread, I hurried on after my silent conductor, whose candle threw strange shadows on pitted walls. I realized that I was beginning to be nervous about this whole affair, and I vainly tried to reason myself out of my fears by concentrating on some definite object.

THERE certainly was nothing reassuring about our surroundings as we proceeded. The leering, crazily burrowed walls of the tunnel looked ghastly in the torchlight. I suddenly felt that this ancient pathway had not been built by anything normal or akin to sanity, and I dared not let my thoughts impinge on the ultimate revelations which might lie ahead. For a long time we crept on in stark silence.

Down, down, down; our way ever narrowed into a deeper, damper darkness. Then the staircase abruptly terminated in a cave. There was a bluish light, phosphorescent as ultraviolet, and I wondered as to its source. It revealed a small, smooth-surfaced, open area, overhung with rows of colossal stalactites and vast basic pylons of massive breadth. Beyond, in the denser dark, were openings to other burrows, leading to seemingly endless vistas of forgotten night. An air of creeping horror froze my heart; we seemed to have profaned in our intrusion some mysteries better left unsought. I began to tremble, but Chaupin gripped me roughly and dug his thin fingers into my shoulders as he told me to keep silent.

He whispered as we huddled side by side in that dim and twilit cavern under the earth; whispered awesomely of what he said lurked and shambled in the darkness just beyond. He would prove now that his words were true; I must wait here while he ventured into the black beyond. When he returned he would bring me proof. So saying, he rose and walked swiftly forward, disappearing almost immediately into one of the burrows just ahead. He left me so suddenly that I did not even have time to voice my objections to his proposal.

I sat there in the darkness and waited—I dared not guess for what. Would Chaupin return? Was it all a monstrous hoax? Was Chaupin mad, or was it all true? If so, what might not happen to him in that labyrinth beyond? And what might happen to me? I had been a fool ever to think of coming: the whole thing was insane. Perhaps those books were not so absurd as I had thought: the earth may nurse hideous secrets in its ageless breast.

The blue light cast screening shadows on the stalactitic walls and crowded closely around the dim circle of luminance afforded by my tiny torch. I did not like those shadows: they were distorted, unhealthy, disconcertingly deep. The silence was even more potent: it seemed to hint of nameless things yet to come; it mocked unbearably my growing fear and loneliness. The minutes crawled like maggots on their way and nothing broke that deadly stillness.

Then came the cry. A sudden crescendo of indescribable madness welled upon the entombed air, and my soul cleaved, for I knew what that cry meant. I knew now—now, when it was too late—that Chaupin's words were true.

But I dared not pause or ponder, for

presently there came a soft padding from the far-off darkness—the rustling scrape of frantic movement. I turned and raced up the subterrene staircase with the speed of utter desperation. No need for me to look back; my horrified ears clearly caught the cadence of running feet. I heard nothing but the clamor of those feet or paws until my own breath rasped in my ears as I rounded the first spiral of those interminable stairs. I stumbled upward, gasping and choking; a realization in my soul that ate away every thought save one of deathly fear and grinning horror. Poor Chaupin!

It seemed to me that the sounds were drawing nearer and nearer; then came a hoarse barking on the stairs directly below; a bestial growling that sickened me with its semi-human tones, and an accompanying laughter that was loathly with horror. They were coming!

I ran on, to the rhythmic thundering of the footfalls below. I dared not glance behind me, but I knew that they were closing the gap. The hairs rose upon my neck as I sped up endless flights that writhed and twisted like a serpent in the earth. I toiled and shrieked aloud, but the baying horrors were at my very heels. On, on, on, on; closer and closer and closer, while my body burned with pain and agony.

The stairs ended at last, and I squirmed madly through the narrow opening while the creatures raced through the darkness barely ten yards behind. I made it just as the candle in my cap flickered out; then I jammed the stone back into place, full in the faces of the foremost oncoming horrors. But as I did so my dying candle flared up for a single moment so that I saw the first of my pursuers in the glaring light. Then it went out; I slammed the portal into place and somehow staggered back to the world of men.

I shall never forget that night, whatever I do to erase those hideous memories; never shall I find the sleep I crave. I dare not even kill myself for fear of being buried instead of cremated; though death would be welcome to such as I have become. I shall never forget, for now I know the *whole* truth of the affair; but there is one memory I would give my soul to blot for ever from my brain—that mad moment when I saw the monsters in the torchlight; the laughing, drooling horrors from below.

For the first and foremost of them all was the laughing, gloating monster known to men as Professor Chaupin!

The Ruler of Fate

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A thrilling, fascinating, thought-provoking tale of romance and a weird creature that rules our Earth from a cavern of horror on the Moon

The Story Thus Far

INJURED in a deadly accident, Kane Montel is ready to abandon his attempts to reach the moon, in his impulse flyer. Bad luck—fate—has defeated him. But then his friend, the statesman Martin Grenfell, tells him that he must carry on, to avert war.

"Tangled circumstances," he says, "fate, has created this world-wide fever of war. It is needless. And you can kill it, Montel, if you reach the moon—with the sense of common human victory. If you fail, civilization is doomed."

And Kane takes off, hastily, for a last grim attempt. Lovely Shiela Hall, his secretary, is with him. And luck has changed miraculously. Without mishap, the two reach the moon, near the mysterious rays of the great crater, Tycho.

Investigating the rays, they are captured by unexpected human dwellers on the moon. Amazingly, Vethlo, the gaunt, young-old leader, speaks English. He seems to know all about them.

"My master is Aru, the Lord of Destiny," Vethlo tells them. "Through the machine, he rules your world. He caused you to reach the moon, because he has a purpose for you—for one of you."

His dark eyes leer at Shiela, dreadful with hidden speculation.

He demonstrates the colossal machine of destiny. Through the terrific force of the rays of Tycho, which curve out to hold the earth in their web of impalpable power, the machine controls the world like a toy.

He forces Shiela to set it in motion, to kill Martin Grenfell. In a screen, they see how he will die, a month later. He presses a button, "on behalf of Kane," and Kane watches the machine cause the destruction of San Francisco, in the coming war.

"Now," Vethlo asks, "are you convinced of the power of Aru?" Shuddering, they admit the machine's omnipotence.

"Then we go to the Lord of Destiny," announces Vethlo. "From his own lips, you may learn your fate.

Shiela and Kane are conducted into the presence of Aru, the ruler of fate. He proves to be a gross, bloated caricature of a man who mocks them and lets them know that he can never be killed, as the machine of destiny protects him. He tells them how he has devised a terrible death as the doom for all dwellers on Earth.

Kane Montel hurls himself upon Aru, with deadly intent; but he is suddenly thrown to the floor in paralyzing agony, seared with fire, unable to touch Aru.

Out of the darkness comes an urgent command: "Stop the flame. He must live." Before them stands an exotic, beautiful woman, tall and slender, in a sheer gown of lustrous black. She is the mother of Aru, but has no power to stop her son's plans for the doom of Shiela and Kane, except some unknown secret

This story began in WEIRD TALES for April

"She floated out of his arms."

she possesses, which is concealed from the otherwise all-knowing machine of destiny.

Aru offers Shiela the choice of becoming his plaything to save Kane's life, or of going back with him to Earth, showing them, with the machine, that they would be driven apart after they reached Earth and both live out long lives of poverty, pain, and madness, never to meet again.

To Aru's consternation, Shiela chooses to return to Earth with Kane.

The story continues:

9. The Secret of the Crystal Urn

"WARR!"

The voice of Athonee pealed out, arresting, electric.

Aru wheeled ponderously upon her, his thin voice snarling—no caress in it now!

"And what now, my mother?" he demanded. "Have I not given her her choice?"

"If she had chosen you, my son," the stately golden woman replied, with strangely mingled elation and pain, "I should have said nothing. I should have

opened to you the secret sector of your fate, and gone back to my lonely place to weep and die.

"But Shiela Hall chose her lover. Her love triumphed over the machine. It revealed a human power stronger than circumstance. It showed me that the machine is not the ruler, absolutely. It proved that my hopes for mankind have not been in vain."

Then the triumph in her tone seemed to stumble over despair. Her voice caught. She swayed toward Aru's couch. Her golden, statuesque form was suddenly tense with suppressed sobs. Her long black eyes rested upon Aru, and Kane saw in them a great devotion, and a greater agony.

"Aru!" her strong voice rang out, heavy with emotion. "My son!"

Her slender arms went out toward him.

Aru was heavily resuming his seat upon the divan. The anger had gone out of his puffy face. He looked up, slowly, indolently, at the stricken loveliness of Athonee, and laughed.

"See, my darling mother," his soft voice mocked her, "you love me still. You can never destroy me—the machine told me that."

"I do love you, Aru," breathed the golden woman, brokenly; "for you are my only son—the only son of all my race."

She paused a moment. Her long eyes watched him, glittering with tears.

"But Shiela Hall," she said, "has shown me how blind is my love for you, how selfish and weak."

She straightened against her burden of pain.

"I will not allow you to send these lovers back to Earth, to the dread fate you have pictured. I am going to take them with me, back to my own dwelling."

Aru's gross flesh went crimson again with rage.

"You cannot," he shrilled. "Remember, I am the master. You gave me the machine, and all its power."

Athonee lifted her slender golden hand, to show the thick white ring, with its tiny knurled studs, and the great, flaming purple jewel set in it.

"You cannot stop us," she said, "now."

Aru stared around him, and down at Vethlo's thin, black-clad form, still helpless on the floor. Under the jeweled crown of pale, fine hair, he shook his big head, in apparent baffled anger. But Kane had seen the fleeting little movement of his hand, on the divan's arm.

"Not now, perhaps," he shrilled. "But I can follow. And I will follow, my dear mother. I shall take them back—and mete out what doom I will to them and their race of crawling vermin. And you——"

For a moment he gasped incoherently, speechless with nameless passion.

"And you! I have had enough of you, and enough of your threats, that kept me from working my will upon you, long ago. Your secret power is a lie; I see it now—the machine tells me nothing of it."

His white, swollen fingers were writhing like thick snakes.

"Yes, my darling mother," the shrill edge of his voice cut at her, "I shall crush your body with my own hands, as I have long desired to."

"Come," Athonee had whispered to Kane and Shiela, while Aru still spoke. "Swiftly, before his slaves are here to stop us."

She drew them away from the divan, the table. Her long fingers were twisting the little studs upon the ring. The purple stone lit with a new, cold fire, and the magnificent ghost of it abruptly surrounded her, a faceted bulk of purple shadow. She mounted, floated within it, above the floor.

"Leap," she called.

And her golden arms reached out to Kane and Shiela.

KANE had seen Aru's covert signal. He was not surprized when the big room under the cone was swiftly thronged with armed men. Attired in gray garments fashioned like the black of Vethlo, they carried pikes and swords and the golden electron needles.

Aru screamed at them shrilly, in a strange tongue. Feet came drumming across the floor.

Kane lifted Shiela into the purple shadow. She floated out of his arms. He leapt upward. The golden hands of Athonee caught him, lifted him. And then he was drifting beside the two women, weightless, in a shining purple mist.

Athonee's golden fingers were again upon the tiny studs of the ring. The flame burned colder in the jewel's purple heart. The shining mist grew thicker. The blue walls of the conoid room grew dim. The charging men in gray were blotted out.

Kane drew Shiela behind his body. He shuddered, expecting a pike or a blast of electrons to come probing through the purple haze.

"We are safe—for the time," Athonee reassured him. "We are no longer in the dwelling of Aru. We have come upon a way where he cannot follow."

"We are—moving?" demanded Kane, incredulously, for he had felt no sense of movement.

"Not in the way you have known motion," said Athonee. "But we are now in the lonely place where I live."

She was twisting the studs upon her ring. The purple haze grew thin. The slight lunar gravitation embraced them gradually, drew them slowly down to the floor of a strange room. The shadow about them vanished, and the cold light died in the purple stone.

Kane was staring in mute wonderment at the ring.

Athonee, reading his curiosity, said:

"This is one heirloom I have from the scientists of my lost race. A small thing, it is yet the key to vast energies. It unlocks the way to a space beyond, from whose vantage-point distance is no barrier, but a bridge.

"Upon the way of the ring, the star you name Capella is as near to me as you are. I have stood upon the twilit strangeness of its seventh planet, and in many another far place—that was in the old, lonely days, before the machine was made, when the call of the new and the far came strongly to me."

For a moment she was silent, and a shadow was in the depths of her eyes. She wiped it away with a slender hand.

"My dwelling," she said, with a simple gesture of a slim golden arm. "You are welcome."

Kane looked away from the jewel, about the room.

Its paneled, many-angled walls were the green of jade. They were translucent, glowing with a deep, soft radiance. The vaulted ceiling was a high, flawless sky of green. The simple, oddly fashioned furnishings were silver and black—couches, small tables, heavy coffers.

On one table was a vase filled with crimson sprays of fern-like leaves. Beyond the wide arches of the unglazed windows lurked the wild darkness of the lunar cavern; black, cragged volcanic rocks, washed with a pallid violet light; dimly lit fields of scarlet, fungoid growth.

"Rest," said Athonee.

She pointed with a stately dignity to a couch; and Kane and Shiela sank into it, gratefully.

"We are all fatigued," she said. "I shall bring refreshment, and a lotion to

aid the healing of Kane. We shall have need of all our strength and courage, when Aru comes."

"Then he can follow us—here?" asked Kane, anxiously.

"He can," said Athonee. "He will. But he and his slaves must trace the labyrinth of the lower caverns. The passages are too small for their ships. They must finish the journey on foot. They cannot arrive for a little time."

"Have you any weapons?" Kane demanded. "If I had a gun——"

Athonee shook her white head, slowly.

"None," she said, "save the secret that is my power over Aru. With that, I could destroy him." She hesitated, reluctant, doubtful. "Yet, in my heart, I know that the machine has told him truth.

"Aru, for all his monstrous nature, is my son, my only son, and the only son of my dead race. I love him, despite all that he has done. I must forgive his cruel weakness, his mad passion, because I know they came from me. In my heart, I know that I can never destroy him, nor give my power to another.

"But I will show you the secret of Aru's doom, when we have had refreshment. To prepare it I must leave you, for I dwell alone in this place of exile."

She glided from the green room.

KANE took Shiela's hand in his. She relaxed beside him, sighing. Her eyes looked up at him, full of a weary, deathless joy.

"I'm glad you chose as you did, Shiela," he whispered.

"And I am, too, Monty," she breathed, "no matter what Aru does."

He tensed. His gray eyes stared through the green arch of a window, at the cragged black precipices looming above a dusky scarlet slope.

"Aru will do enough," he muttered, grimly. "Vicious. And powerful. Our hostess won't do anything. I suppose you can't blame her, since he's her son. I'd give a million for a good automatic."

Gray eyes darkened somberly, he shook his head.

"Wouldn't be any use, though, I suppose. Not against that monster, with his hands on the wheels of destiny. Not against that electron gun." He bit his lip. "Anyhow, the machine had this all settled, ten thousand years ago."

He squeezed her hand again.

"Nothing for it but to stick together, kid. See it through, best way we can."

Athonee returned, with a basket. She gave Kane a jar of fragrant ointment, and he went behind a screen to rub it on his seared, painful skin. When he had finished, he found a small table spread with such food as Vethlo had given them upon the ship: small scarlet fruits, brown cakes, purple wine.

ATHONEE served Shiela and Kane, and relaxed upon another couch, opposite. Sipping wine, she looked at them thoughtfully. Presently, in a sober, deliberate tone, she began to speak.

"Before Aru comes," she said, "I must tell you the story of the machine of destiny, and of the lives bound up with it. A part of it you know already. And I must make the telling brief; for Aru will soon be here, to destroy me, and to drag you away to the cruel doom he plans."

Kane leaned forward anxiously.

"We can't fight him?" he demanded. "There's—nothing——"

Athonee shook her snowy head. Her long eyes dwelt somberly upon the two.

"My race is not your race," she went on, "though we are kindred species, cousins. Your fathers were yet brutes of the forest when my people reached their pinnacle of achievement upon the earth. Your fathers had not even the secret of

fire, when my people had fashioned science into a perfect tool, when they had mastered natural forces yet unsuspected by your savants."

She touched the purple-jeweled ring upon her finger, and Kane bent forward in eager wonder.

"This ring is but one marvel they created. Its energy-field taps the cosmic forces of a higher dimension to bend the space in which we dwell. It makes distance but an imaginary concept."

She looked away from the ring, and a shadow fell upon her pointed, elfin face.

"But for all the wonder of their science and the splendor of their cities, my people never overcame the heritage of the brute. Their united strength was ever sapped by a strain of selfish emotion. And their new machines left them too little work to do, left too much energy to be spent in passion.

"Hatred gripped their civilization. Reason fell before animal selfishness. The tower of their accomplishment was overwhelmed in the red flood of war. And not one of my species, upon all the earth, survived the final war.

"A few of us, however, escaped the holocaust. We fled to the moon upon the power of the ring."

Her black eyes looked moodily past the two, back into the mists of time.

"Nearly a score of us came here, before the war was ended," she said, "both men and women. We should have found happiness. We came to carve out a new dwelling-place for our kind. We brought the finest treasures that science had given our race—even the last great discovery, that came in the midst of the final war: the secret of life.

"We might all have lived here upon the moon, happy, secure, eternal. But we brought the curse of our kind to the moon; and after our dwellings were prepared, in these great caverns, our selfish, animal energy ran to mad waste. I need not tell the dreadful story of rivalry, jealousy, hate, murder."

Dark fires slumbered in her eyes.

"At last," she said, after a moody silence, "but two men were left—and I. One man was my lover. The other slew him, for jealousy. That man I slew, for revenge. Then I was alone upon the moon, and the last of my race."

Athonee was silent again for a little time, with pain upon her golden face. Her eyes still gazed into time.

"I was impelled to join my lover in death," she said slowly, "yet I had the desire to live. And the secret of life that we had brought from the earth made death needless, so I lived. And time passed by; and presently, to fill the emptiness of my life, I took up the science of my lost race, and went forward with it.

"And the day came when I conceived the machine of destiny. At first I saw it only as a means to knowledge, a window to the past and the future, a key to unlock the last hidden secret of the universe. And then I saw the possibility of control.

"The fathers of mankind were yet in the forest, then. They were peering ahead, but still held down by the chains of the brute. I built the machine to free them, and to lead them up the road of civilization that otherwise—so I read from the machine—they could never have found.

"Through the unsensed, universal influence of the machine, I guided your race upward. Step by step, I aided them. I gave them fire, tools, metal, writing, art. I would carry them, I thought, safely beyond the pitfalls of animal selfishness that destroyed my race.

"And thus I brought men to the state that is dimly recalled in your traditions of Atlantis. Upon a continent that has been overwhelmed, I lifted them to almost the level that my own people once

reached. And I planned to lead them higher, to the perfection that I had dreamed of, in the ages of my lonely life upon the moon.

"But the weakness of my selfish passion rose again before me, as the machine had warned me that it might.

"Looking upon the earth, upon the race that I had lifted from the brute, I saw a man. I loved him. I consulted the machine, and it foretold all the terror that might be born of our love. And for a time I allowed the man to remain upon the earth.

"But in the end, animal selfishness overcame me. The ring carried me into the chamber where the man lay with a daughter of Earth in his arms. And presently he left her willingly, and came with me. I brought him with me to the moon, and gave to him the eternal youth, which only violence can destroy.

"You have seen that man," said Athonee. "His name is Vethlo."

Kane's mind went back to the thin man in black, with such a weight of suffering in his age-weary eyes.

"Here upon the moon, in the dwelling where I had been alone and lonely through ages so long, we loved. The machine had told me what our child would be, the hybrid of two races. But passion swept us on, and Aru was born.

"I knew all the sorrow and the pain that he could bring to us, and to his father's race upon the earth. And because of that, I prepared the thing that now gives me power over him. But Aru was the crown of my selfish love, and I could not bring myself to stop his evil course.

"ARU sought power as he grew up. He plotted to seize the machine, to make his father a slave, to exile me here—he wished to destroy me, but fear of my secret restrained him.

"All the selfish passion, the animal stain, of both races, seemed distilled into Aru. He was a creature of pure, malignant hate. From the beginning he knew that he was a monster, like no being that ever lived or ever would live. He knew that he must dwell for ever alone, and that he could never beget his kind.

"His loneliness, his monstrosity, filled him with bitterness for all others. He hated his father. He hated me for giving him birth. He hated all men, because they were unlike him.

"Therefore he plotted to humble me and his father, and to degrade and destroy humanity. I knew of his plot. But I loved him; I pitied him in his monstrosity and his pain. I could not move to stop him. And Vethlo had ever feared him.

"So he took the machine, and made his father a slave, and sent me here.

"And that is all—save that I will show you my secret."

Athonee rose. With majesty in the sweep of her walk, she crossed the room, and knelt to open a long coffer. Her slender golden hands laid back soft wrappings. They lifted a tall, frail urn.

Slowly, handling the urn with utmost care, Athonee brought it back and set it upon the low table.

Kane and Shiela cried out together at its beauty, at its slender grace. It was of some milk-white, opalescent crystal, inlaid delicately with black and with scarlet.

"I fashioned this urn," said Athonee. "And I wove its life into the life of my son, upon the loom of fate. The breaking of the urn will start the machine of destiny, and the machine will forge a sword of fate to destroy my son.

"And when that was done, I closed a sector of life to the machine, so that it can never reveal this fact to another, and so that it can never cut the thread between the urn and my son.

"Many times, as Aru humiliated me and degraded his father, and destroyed the civilization that I had been building so long, as he overwhelmed the fair continent that you know as Atlantis, and played at his cruel jests—many times I have been moved to hurl down the urn upon the floor.

"And yet I cannot," her voice choked; "I cannot destroy my son."

And she set the urn farther back upon the table, as if to shield it from any accidental mishap.

Then her small, pointed face went rigid with surprize. Her red mouth opened to a tiny circle. For a moment she inclined her snowy head, listening. In the distance, Kane heard the rattle of a dislodged pebble, the clatter of metal, the tramp of many feet.

Consternation mounted to Athonee's face.

"Aru!" she whispered, voiceless with dread. "Already he comes, with his slaves—to destroy me, and to drag you away to the fate he plans."

10. "My Son . . . Destroy Me!"

KANE'S gray eyes fell speculatively upon the slender beauty of the crystal urn. Was it possible that the life of the jesting master of destiny was bound up with this delicate perfection in white and black and scarlet, so that the end of the one would doom the other?

His mind put aside the strangeness of it, to accept the fact. For it was no stranger, after all, than the machine of destiny, and the wonders he had seen within the machine.

His gray eyes narrowed a little, suddenly. His lean chin set and his big body abruptly tensed.

Athonee's quick glance read his thought.

"Kane Montel," she swiftly warned him, "do not touch the urn. You could not break it. Attempting to harm it, you could only destroy your own life. When I fashioned the urn, fearing that it might be shattered by another, accidentally or maliciously, I safeguarded it with the machine of destiny.

"You should know, too, that the life of my son is guarded by the machine; and that whosoever slays Aru shall immediately be stricken down."

Kane sank back wearily upon the couch, beside Shiela. His lean face was haggard with baffled desperation.

"Nothing," he muttered bitterly. "Nothing we can do. Everywhere we turn the thing was all settled, ages ago, on that accursed machine."

The swift tramp of feet was louder, now. Kane heard low, quick voices, ringing through the green arches of the unglazed windows. Athonee rose. She faced the broad doorway, looking out upon twilit scarlet garden and soaring volcanic cliffs.

The doorway was suddenly filled with men.

"Salutations, mother, darling," the liquid voice of Aru floated into the room. It was soft, mockingly endearing.

Kane and Shiela sat motionless upon the divan, staring at the door. Kane's arm was about the girl's shoulders. She trembled against him. For a desperate, frightened moment, her eyes looked up at his face. They were wide and purple with fear.

Athonee stood near them, watching the doorway. Her tall, slender body was rigid. Despair had fixed her golden, pointed face. Her long black eyes were molten with pain.

Aru led the men crowding through the arch of green crystal. He had changed his sheer robes for fine, linked mail of gleaming purple. He was a ponderous, lurching mountain of puffy white

flesh. His small, greenish eyes glittered with malevolent amusement from the white rolls of his face.

Fifty men followed him. They wore close-fitting gray. For weapons they carried swords, pikes, golden needles of flaming death. Behind Aru, they spread out across the floor, alert, menacing.

Among them, Kane saw Vethlo. The thin man's knee, evidently, was still hurt from Kane's kick; for he was sitting upon a crude litter improvised from pikes, carried between two men. In his lean fingers Kane glimpsed the golden needle of his electron gun.

So this somber-eyed, white-haired man, then, with his singular look of mingled youth and age, was the beloved of Athonee, and the father of Aru? Watching him, Kane saw his eyes fasten upon Athonee's golden loveliness. A sudden warm eagerness flooded them. And that warmth was instantly chilled with cold despair.

The dark, sad eyes crossed Kane's. There was a little flicker of greeting in them, but nothing of resentment. And Kane knew that the man harbored no ill feeling for that painful kick upon the knee.

Vethlo looked from Kane to the purple-mailed bulk of Aru, standing just before him. Kane was puzzled by the swift emotion that filled the dark eyes of this weirdly ancient man, as he looked upon his son.

There was love, Kane thought; an agonizing tenderness. There was fear, a humble, shuddering dread. But there was something beyond these, and greater —a slumbering flame, intense, yet veiled, hidden. What could it be? Resentment, Kane guessed. A smothered hatred, ancient and bitter.

Breathless, speechless, stricken, Athonee stood eyeing Aru.

He swayed across the green room, toward her. He stopped, when there was only the small table between them, with the peerless grace of the crystal urn resting upon it. Heavily, he planted himself. He braced himself with a long staff, jeweled, scarlet-lacquered.

His small, hard eyes looked across the urn, at Athonee. The buttery masses of his white face were twisted into a leer of peculiarly brutal, malicious triumph. His inadequate scarlet mouth opened, and he began to laugh. The grossness of his flesh shuddered against the tight purple mail.

"My darling mother," he gasped, as the spasm of laughter subsided, "have you no tongue to bid welcome to your only son, when he comes after so long to your dwelling?"

His words faded again into pitiless, mocking laughter.

THE quivering restraint of the golden woman broke abruptly into choking sobs. She swayed unsteadily around the small table, to Aru.

"My son," she cried, in the low, dead voice of heart-break. "Aru, how can you be so, when you are my only son?"

She reached him, and tried to throw her slim, golden arms about him.

The ponderous thickness of Aru's puffy arm came slowly up. With deliberate, brutal strength, his great white hand struck the woman's face. She reeled backward from the blow, and stumbled, and fell headlong to the floor.

Aru laughed softly.

"So, my dear mother," he said, "you love me still. The machine tells me that you love me too much to destroy me—even if indeed you have this boasted secret, which I believe is a lie."

Glancing at the thin form of Vethlo, drawn half upright on his rude stretcher, Kane was amazed at the agony that twisted his long face. His mouth was

twisted, trembling, with some inner conflict. His dark eyes were pools of pain.

Pale and silent and quivering, Athonee gathered herself upon her knees. She made some little effort to rise, and then sank back to the floor. Her pointed, small face looked up at the purple-mailed bulk of Aru, haggard with ultimate despair.

"My son," she whispered brokenly, "destroy me if you will. I cannot use the secret."

Aru wheeled ponderously upon his scarlet staff.

"The machine told me that, dear mother," he said, in fluid tones of malicious caress. "And the machine is master of events, and I am master of the machine.

"I am going to destroy you, my mother, as I should have done, time and time again, but for my foolish fear of your lies. So, my darling, compose yourself to die. And prepare yourself to endure in dying a little pain, for I shall slay you with my own hands, in a manner whose sweetness I have long foretasted."

The golden woman shuddered a little, on the floor. Her black eyes remained fixed upon the face of Aru. On her face was mute agony, and she made no sound.

Aru turned slowly. He looked at the lean, black-clad form of Vethlo, heaped upon the stretcher, clutching the golden needle of his weapon. And the thin man, Kane saw, brushed the conflict and the agony from his face as Aru turned, so that only the shadow of old pain was left for Aru to see.

"My father," said the sweet, high voice, "may live on for a time, and serve me. He shall remain my slave and the master of my slaves. For he fears me, the machine tells me. He knows that my slayer will die with me. And the machine has not warned me of danger from him."

He turned to Kane and Shiela. They were still upon the couch, trembling in the silent embrace of despair.

"When my mother is dead," his venomously sweet voice assured them, "I shall take you both back to my dwelling. And I shall seek in you the cream of my jest with mankind."

Releasing Shiela, Kane surged up from the couch. Bare hands clenched, he lunged savagely toward Aru. He realized the blind futility of the attack. But his restraint could endure Aru's torture no longer. Outraged senses drove him forward, heedless, unreasoning.

Aru moved his white hand. Indolently, he signaled. Vethlo lifted the golden needle of his weapon. Purple, crackling flame leapt from it. Kane was hurled to the floor by a resistless flood of pain.

Aru chuckled softly.

"Kane Montel," he said softly, "it is well that you struggle against me. It amuses me. You are playing your part in the jest, as I planned that you should play it, long before the day of your birth.

"You may have the pleasure of resisting me again, and many times, in the years to come, as we finish the jest—you, and Shiela, and I."

He chuckled again.

Kane sprawled on the floor. His mind was numb with despair. His twitching body was paralyzed with pain beyond endurance. Shiela dropped to her knees beside him, seeking in vain to ease his agony.

Aru looked slowly away.

"Now," he said, "I shall kill my mother——"

"No!" the word rasped from Kane's tortured throat.

His muscles trembled and cramped as he struggled in vain to drag himself back to his feet. The flame from Vethlo's golden needle struck him again, and hurled him back into helpless agony.

"I know that my mother is beautiful,"

said Aru, softly, "and ever it has pleased me to destroy beauty." His hard, small eyes were gloating upon the tall grace of the crystal urn. "This trinket," he said, "my mother has long treasured. And I have long wished to destroy it, because it is beautiful, and because it is precious to her.

"Now I shall shatter it, as I shall shatter her beauty."

Deliberately, he picked up the flawless urn. His great, puffy hand held it high. Glittering with malevolent amusement, his small greenish eyes went to the crouching form of Athonee. He chuckled mockingly.

Desperately, Athonee was shaking her white head. Her lips moved frantically, but emotion held her speechless.

"Does it please you, darling," Aru inquired softly, "to see how you are to die?"

"Stay, my son!" the urgent appeal broke forth at last. "Don't break the urn! Your doom——"

A GLEAMING miracle in crystal, opal-white and ebon and scarlet, the urn had already left the fingers of Aru. It spun down toward Athonee. It struck the floor, and dissolved with a musical, tinkling crash into a momentary spray of bright fragments.

"My son!" moaned Athonee.

Aru was striding heavily toward her. his huge, white, thick-fingered hands were twitching with a hideous avidity.

Kane heard a gasping, muted cry of agony from Vethlo. He saw the thin man come rigidly erect upon his stretcher. Vethlo's long face was contorted with the agony of a supreme conflict. In the instant that Kane looked, that conflict was resolved. Agony gave way to grim purpose.

The thin, knotted hand brought up the golden needle. Held steady and true, it pointed at the striding bulk of Aru. A blinding torrent of purple flame gushed from the needle's point.

Aru, within his tight mail, stopped, stricken. His big body was driven a little backward. It shuddered convulsively. Purple flame enveloped it. Smoke burst from the jeweled crown of fine, pale hair. The odor of burnt flesh swiftly filled the room. The big body slumped and fell heavily upon the floor.

Aru lay motionless, a mountain of seared flesh, smoking.

"My son!" wailed Athonee. "He is dead."

A strange, hoarse cry of terror drew Kane's eyes to Vethlo. Agony twisted his long face. He tried vainly to hurl away the black globe of his weapon. It seemed to burst in his upraised hand. Kane heard a loud report. Vethlo was enveloped in a momentary flare of violet flame.

For an instant afterward, he sat erect, quivering with hysteria.

"I have killed Aru!" he screamed, shrilly. "I killed my son, and I must die! The machine has decreed that the killer of Aru must die!"

Then pain and weakness overcame him. His thin body tensed for a moment, and then fell limply back upon the stretcher. The shattered globe of the electron gun fell from his inert fingers. In a low, broken voice he gasped:

"Athonee, my love! Come to me, before I die. I love you still, Athonee. And I am dying, because I killed our son, for you."

Pale and silent, the golden woman got uncertainly to her feet, and walked unsteadily to the stretcher. Vethlo reached out his hand, as she came near, and she took it. His lips moved. A brief, hoarse sound came from his throat. Then his thin arm stiffened and relaxed, and Kane knew that he was dead.

Athonee stood holding the limp hand.

"How blind I was!" she wailed. "His hate was the hidden factor that the machine could never reveal."

She stumbled back to Aru, and dropped beside the inert mass of his body.

"My son!" she sobbed, her voice high and dreadful with grief. "My son is dead."

11. "Mightier Than the Machine!"

KANE and Shiela were walking, many hours later, in the scarlet, unfamiliar garden below the green, domed mass of Athonee's dwelling. They were bathed in a cool, violet dusk. Beyond the strange, graceful plants loomed the black and rugged cavern walls, broken here and there by the mysterious darkness of farther spaces.

Kane's big body was bandaged. He walked a little stiffly, and winced now and then from the pain of an unaccustomed movement. But his lean face was smiling, and his mind was less upon his injuries than upon the laughing girl beside him.

"It's hard to realize it, Monty," she whispered once. "But it's all over, like a bad dream. With Aru dead, it must be."

Her hand closed on his, with a quick, light pressure.

"Does seem queer, kid," he said, "to think we can have each other, for keeps, without fate making a joke of us. Hard to believe."

Then he saw Athonee, coming through the delicate scarlet fronds.

Her tall, golden slenderness was once more erect. She had put on a simple robe of the same snowy whiteness as her hair. Her small, pointed face was still marked with grief, but it was composed. Her long dark eyes smiled a little, as she greeted the two.

"My dead are put away," she told them quietly. "The servants of my son I have sent back to his dwelling. I shall follow them soon, to take my old place beside the machine of destiny."

Still holding Shiela's hand, Kane faced the golden woman earnestly.

"What's going to happen, now?" he asked her. "All those dreadful things that Aru showed us—must they take place? The death of Martin Grenfell? The War? Must the world be destroyed with these atomic bombs?"

"About Monty and me?" asked Shiela, her voice low with anxiety. "Must our lives be what Aru showed us? Must we be separated when we get back to Earth? Must we spend all those terrible years searching for each other? Must we endure all that suffering?"

Athonee smiled a little, and shook her white head.

"The machine still rules the future," she said. "I can change all that Aru showed you. I can save the life of Martin Grenfell. His efforts, and your triumphant return from the moon, will avert the threatened war.

"I will send lasting peace and new happiness with you, back to Earth."

Her somber eyes went past them, into some far space of the lunar caverns.

"I will not let the machine into another's hands, again," she said. "I will make it serve its first purpose, of lifting your race to true manhood.

"A terrible interlude this has been, since I surrendered the machine to my son. But I think the terror and the pain of it have burned all the weakness and passion and selfishness, all the animal, out of me. I can go ahead now, untroubled, toward my old aim."

"But we two?" asked Shiela, apprehensively.

And Kane said, "What of us?"

Athonee smiled again, quietly.

"I shall now carry you back to your flyer," she promised them. "And I can assure the *Spirit of Man* a safe flight back to Earth, and a happier landing than my son showed you.

"And I shall send you happiness on Earth that will be full reward for all your sufferings. You both deserve reward," she said softly, with a tender radiance in her long black eyes, "for it was your choice that won the victory. It was your love that proved mightier than the machine of destiny, and changed the course of fate."

[THE END]

Mordecai's Pipe

By A. V. MILYER

If Pettigrew had obeyed that inner warning and refused to smoke the pipe, the weird catastrophe would not have happened

"JANUARY 7—McNally sent the pipe today. I found it waiting when I returned home from the office this evening. Oh, it's quite an ordinary-looking pipe; a four-inch stem, badly chewed around the mouthpiece, and a large, round bowl, worn smooth and dark from constant handling. One would never think to look at it that it had had such a gruesome past.

"But McNally swears that it was the one cherished possession of old Peter Mordecai, the fellow they executed at the state prison last week. And what a malevolent old devil *he* must have been! Seems that all the other prisoners shunned him as they would a plague—but then who wouldn't shun a man who's killed four children and used their bodies for God-only-knows what crazy rites? Not that the absence of fellowship worried Mordecai, though; for they say that he even refused to speak to guards, silencing their attempts with that wolfish snarl that the newspapers made so much of.

"Oh, how plainly I can see him—smoking his pipe as he grins over the mangled bodies of his victims; smoking it throughout the endless days at the death-house; even smoking it as he takes that last, brief walk to the gallows. I can see him on the very scaffold, shoving his pipe at McNally with a muttered 'Here, Warden,' and a rotten, knowing leer as though he were in possession of some filthy secret.

"Is it any wonder that McNally didn't want it? Is it any wonder that, knowing of my bad taste for gruesome curios, he sent it along to me? I'm sure that no one, however morbid, could desire a more macabre souvenir than this, the pipe of Mordecai.

"It's odd how past events can cast a sinister light upon perfectly innocent objects. This pipe, now—just because of

old Mordecai's devilish malevolence, his unearthly hate of all mankind—it repels and fascinates me at the same time. Oh, the power of the human mind is unlimited.

"But enough of this! First thing you know I'll be seeing old Mordecai himself in one of the shadowy corners of my little study here. Too much imagination is a bad thing. . . ."

PETTIGREW laid down his pen, pushed back the voluminous diary that was his sole emotional outlet, and gazed fixedly at the battered old briar that lay on the desk before him. He quivered perceptibly as the odd little thought grew in his mind; the thought that told him to smoke the pipe.

With a wry half-smile at his own queerness he tried to dismiss the thought, but it persisted. Smoke the pipe—the pipe that a madman's lips had last caressed; the pipe that murdering fingers had last fondled. How novel it would be! How utterly fantastic! The normal element in Pettigrew's mind whispered "No!"; the morbid strain shouted "Yes!"

Pettigrew found himself reaching slowly for the humidor that rested at his left elbow. He picked up the battered briar and carefully packed the hard-coated interior of the bowl with his private mixture of fragrant tobaccos. Then, with an involuntary shudder of disgust at his audacity, he thrust the bitten mouthpiece into his mouth and carefully applied a match.

As he expelled the first blue smoke-cloud from his lungs, Pettigrew reflected with amusement upon the shocked amazement his friends would register if he told them of his rather ghastly experiment. He was suddenly brought back to the present by a momentary twinge of pain. He had, it seemed, pinched a portion of his soft mouth-tissue between stem and teeth so that it bled. With a grimace at his own nervousness, he replaced the pipe and again inhaled deeply. Odd that the pipe should seem so unwieldy, almost as if unseen fingers were tugging at it!

The blinding suddenness of the flash of red-hot agony brought Pettigrew to his feet in a mad leap that upset his chair with a crash. Like a puppet on a string he caromed madly about the room, knocking over lamps and furniture in a sudden fight for breath. His throat was gripped by a constricting band of fire that filled it with hellish, strangling pain—a grip that made his brain spin and roar in an insane cacophony. His clawing fingers were tearing wildly at his contorted mouth when he finally crashed to the floor.

DOCTOR CLAYTON, from his crouched position over Pettigrew's sprawled body, beckoned to Sergeant McCullough.

"Of all the damn-fool ways to die!" growled the doctor, pointing to the gaping jaws that helped make a grotesque mockery of the empurpled thing that had once been a human face. "It's a pipe—you can barely see part of the bowl there at the top of his throat. But how in God's name could a fellow possibly swallow a pipe—stem first, at that? McCullough, if it weren't all so damned ridiculous I'd swear that someone *rammed* it down the poor devil's throat!"

Lethe

By HAROLD G. SHANE

A bizarre little story about the strange fascination of an old oil painting

KARL VON BRAEL saw the landscape through the dirty window of a tiny shop on Commerce Row. Have you ever felt that you had to have something—an old book, an odd bit of furniture? Karl felt that way, although he had never wanted to buy a painting before.

It was cheap, the painting, and so somber and gloomy that the little shopkeeper had despaired of selling it. So Karl fished most of the money out of his thin pay envelope and went out of the door with the canvas held firmly under his arm. That night he hung it on one of the dingy walls of his bachelor quarters.

After a meager supper, he attempted to read, but the landscape danced over the pages of his mediocre novel; so he turned his big chair around to the wall and switched off all the lights in the room except for the little one that was fastened to the frame of the picture. It was very quiet in the room, and Karl felt pleasantly relaxed as he gazed at his new acquisition.

The painting was one of utterly depressing gloom, but he did not mind, for he was one of those creatures that flourish in dank, chilly places where only toadstools, mushrooms, and lichens have any right to flourish. As to theme the picture was simple: a river, of a death-like, gray-green hue, that coiled between solemn, tree-lined banks under a moon that was nearly full. But the artist had crammed an almost painful suggestion of heaviness and sorrow into the scene. An old man, in a barge on the river, seemed to epitomize the sentiment of the landscape as he poled his craft upstream toward a distant bend that was obscured by shadows. The heaviness and sorrow appealed to Karl; he had known sorrow to the full, and could almost feel a kinship with the stooped old toiler.

Lazily he arose and stepped nearer to the painting. To his delight, the effectiveness of the thing was not marred by a close examination, as would have been true of an ordinary oil. A brass plate, nailed to the frame and almost indistinguishable from the tarnished and peeling gilding, was inscribed with badly corroded letters, L-e-t — "Lethe," Karl spelled out. Lethe, one of many names in ancient Hellenic and pre-Hellenic myths for the sourceless river of forgetfulness and oblivion. The cheerless picture was aptly named.

But Karl did not know this. He merely grunted at what seemed gibberish to him, and returned to his seat. Dreamily he watched the painting. The thing was beautifully executed. The dark and leafless trees that grew to the edge of the water were reproduced with uncanny exactness. Their twisted boles had an acid-eaten look of age, and an illusion of movement was created by the pattern of their interlacing boughs sketched against the slate-colored sky. The perspective was almost stereoscopic in its perfection, and the focus of the picture made Karl feel that he drifted down the river toward the

bend that was lost in impenetrable shadow.

As he kept his attention steady, the illusion of reality grew until at last it seemed that he actually looked upon a dreary river and forest, rather than upon a scene created by the abnormally skilful brushwork of an artist.

For a moment Karl was frightened by this unearthly quality in the landscape. He aroused himself, lit a cigarette, and drew a cloud of smoke into his lungs. Then, as he expelled twin streamers from his nostrils, he succumbed to the novelty of the situation. He had a new toy, a splendid new toy that was to provide him with endless entertainment.

As the time passed, Karl tried to imagine that the lusterless water was oozing toward the distant turn, and that the spectral trees swayed in the wind that drove the grimy clouds across the sky. Marvelous! The river *was* flowing sluggishly along, and the clouds had all but covered the moon.

He could smell the dampness, and the rotting vegetation on the banks, and he could feel the hard wooden seat beneath him as he moved down the river. The prow in front of him was richly carved and covered with bizarre designs. Why, he was in a boat that rode low in the water; a barge of some sort. But how had he left his armchair? How had he gotten where he was? The whole thing was too complicated for his mind. His amazement grew. . . .

Someone was rowing; an old man, he decided, for he could hear the labored wheezing of asthmatic lungs, and the boat moved slowly as if the lazy current helped it along as much as the efforts of its pilot. Yes, it was a very old man like . . . like the bent old fellow in the picture.

In the picture! Seconds passed before the enormity of his thoughts made an impression on Karl's brain. Everything about him was exactly as it was in the landscape that he had purchased! He tried to turn, to look about him, but to his horror he learned that he was unable to move even so much as the end of his little finger. He sat rigid on his seat, denied even the power of quaking from his fear. Then his terror gradually abated. After all, he was in no pain, and nothing menaced him. Why, he had had dreams that were far more unbearable than his present ride.

Hmm. Probably that's what it was. Yet it seemed rather long for a dream. Perhaps the dream took so long because the boatman was so slow. Karl chuckled mentally at his feeble bit of humor; mentally, of course, because only his brain was his. The strange paralysis still held his muscles in thrall.

As best he could, he looked ahead, determined to enjoy himself as thoroughly as possible. In front of the barge, the river ribboned on toward the bend, and on the banks withered trees reached for the bleak sky. A translucent haze or mist of light was everywhere. (Odd that he hadn't noticed it from his chair!) It was of the pale gray-green shade created when moonlight is diffused through thin clouds. An easy breeze stirred the dry leaves on the shore and caught at Karl's hair as if it possessed strengthless fingers. It made his scalp itch, and he longed to relieve the irritation by running his fingers through his hair.

The haze grew thicker, and the shoreline lost some of its distinct outlines. With a start, Karl realized that the turn in the river was not far ahead. For the first time since his translation into this dream world, he began to worry. When

was the dream going to end? However, it was difficult even to worry, for a heavy lethargy seemed to be stealing over his brain, and he was almost comfortable.

Dim and distorted by the haze—no, it was a genuine fog now—the bend loomed up ahead. The folds of shadow about it were as dark as ever, too, not diluted by his approach as plain, everyday shadows would have been diluted. It was all so unnatural. As he stared, Karl became afraid once more. He had not even a faint desire to go farther, but his lassitude kept him from knowing real terror.

The barge continued snail-like on its course, and the mute boatman gave no sign of comprehending his passenger's feeble wishes to return. But this was to be expected, for Karl was incapable of expressing these wishes by any sound or movement.

Then, quite as abruptly as he had found himself on the river, Karl found that a crazy presentiment had taken hold of him. If he once rounded that bend in the river, he would never return. He would be out of the picture! In a dull frenzy he tried to move his inanimate body; frantically he tried to exert his will over the malignant influences that bound him. It was wasted effort, and now he was almost past caring.

A stand of birch trees with tight-drawn, unhealthy-looking bark loomed through the fog. A sick, tickling feeling assailed Karl's stomach. Those sallow birches were right at the bend! A faint current seemed to tug at the barge and hasten it along. Now the mist was so dense that the trees were fading from sight, even as he drew near to them. . . .

The shore was completely obscured. He could scarcely make out the slow flexion of the black water over the bow of the boat. . . .

The fog was turning black. Were the shadows mixing with it and turning it black? It was so dark . . . and cold. Black! He could no longer see the outline of the carved prow. . . .

Black! Black! Black! The word filtered through his numb brain. He tried to utter it, but made no sound. The boatman was wheezing stertorously . . . the bend . . .

The barge was turning. . . .

The cigarette in Karl's hand burned shorter and shorter. For a while the odor of charring flesh filled the drab room. Later it mingled with the stuffy smell of smoldering mohair. After burning a hole in the upholstery of the chair, the cigarette went out.

Karl did nothing about his fingers or the mohair, because he was no longer capable of doing anything save to stare at a bend in the river that hung before his glazing eyes; a bend in a river that was unvexed by a boat of any sort as it flowed into crape-like shadows. A few tall trees reared out of a ground mist that clung along the banks. Although the presence of the mist precluded the possibility of any wind, their branches seemed to twitch against the sky.

Toward morning, a pocket of gas exploded in a sewer below Karl's window. It shook the painting loose from the poorly driven nail that held it to the wall, and it thudded to the floor. The scaly frame split, and the canvas in it tore easily from the impact, as though it were very old and dry.

Karl continued to stare at the spot where the bend had been. . . .

The Harbor of Ghosts

By M. J. BARDINE

A strange and curious weird tale of the sea, and the ghosts of ships that had foundered

IT ALWAYS came to me just at the edge of twilight, that strange figure. Never was there spoken word, yet I knew there was a message for me could I but find the key. That was when I was very young and could not put into words the idea which so dimly presented itself. The figure never came to me except in the old attic of my grandfather's house where I loved to go in the afternoons after school hours, there to dream over the many strange things he had brought with him from the fascinating countries he had voyaged to in his ship, *The Golden Girl*, the ship that had disappeared that last fatal trip the year in which I was born.

I was never afraid, for it seemed to be a natural thing, and the figure, vague and gossamer, not unfriendly. These excursions into the attic lapsed during my term of apprenticeship in my father's shipbuilding yards. My family were all more or less seafaring; it was in the blood, and my father carried on the traditions of the family by building the more modern carriers of our flag in the merchant trade, and I was destined for the service.

Thus it was that when I had finished my poring over maps, plans and instruments, my father found a berth for me on the *Joseph B.*, which followed in the paths of the long-gone *Golden Girl* in the China trade.

I was soon ready for sea; my sea-chest was aboard, and then before the ship sailed the next morning, I journeyed the short distance down to the old house where I had spent so many of my childhood days with the old aunt who still lived there.

Once more I was drawn to the attic to say good-bye to the strange weapons—the feathered head-dresses, the sandalwood boxes and embroidered shawls that had journeyed with my grandfather through wind and rain, salt spume and torrid sun. And then once more the veiled figure came to me from the shadow of the carved screen whence it had always appeared. The eery sensation of my youngster days came back to me as I felt its presence. The lips moved, and in the recesses of my brain echoed the whisper, "Go back! Go back!" What I was to go back from I did not know. Now, too late, I know. The figure faded and melted into the shadows as I pretended a bravery I did not feel. I left the attic telling myself it was all imagination built up from some remembrance of my childhood days.

The *Joseph B.* sailed next day with me at the rail. I felt very important and part of the great world as I stood there gazing back at the little group of relatives and family friends whom I now seem fated never to see again.

I am writing this by the fitful gleam of a lantern hung at the taffrail on the *Golden Girl*—my God, yes! the *Golden Girl!* But wait, after I have set down a story so strange, so unbelievable, I will place what I have written in a bottle, cork it and set it adrift, hoping that even should there be no escape for me from this ghastly place, some strange tide may carry word of my fate back to the world of living men.

The first half of the voyage in the *Joseph B.* was uneventful to my shipmates, who had gone over the way so many times. But for me, who for the first time gazed upon the colorful ports, it was all strange and wonderful, the jargon of unfamiliar tongues, the noisome odors of the oriental waterfront making it all an epic of adventure. In Ceylon we took on a load of teas and spices; silks and Chinese merchandize in Hong Kong, and so after loading turned to the long journey home. Then in the straits the glass started to fall, ominous clouds gathered and the wind blew until it seemed we were caught in a maelstrom of fury. The wheel refused to respond to human intelligence, and we were whirled hither and thither in the vortex of a sea seemingly gone mad with hatred of the puny thing which was our ship, now tossed like a cork, with straining seams and laboring engines. We had been taking turns at the pumps; for by now the ship was leaking badly, and after my period of duty I went to my cabin and, utterly exhausted, threw myself on my bunk. I was asleep before my head touched the pillow.

I must have slept quite some time; for I had dream after dream, or I should say nightmares, wherein the veiled figure was trying to hold me back from something. I was awakened by a terrific crash, the impact of which hurled me from my bunk against the door opposite. I shook myself together and gradually came back to the reality of what was going on. I could dimly hear the shouted orders of the captain on the deck outside, while the ship quivered in every timber and listed sharply.

I managed to get the door open and staggered onto the sea-swept deck. A terrific flare of lightning showed our position. We were hard fast on a jutting rock thrust up in the midst of the boiling sea—a rock which must have been the result of some submarine upheaval. We had struck almost amidships, or else the rock had been forced up under us; for the deck was splintered, telling me we were broken in two. Giant waves dashing against the rock drenched our bows, and the ship was being rapidly pounded to pieces.

Drenched and shivering, I held onto a stanchion until I could steady myself in a slight measure. A wave tore loose my hold, and sliding, gasping for breath, I slid down against the rail, which I grasped with desperate strength and held while fresh seas poured over me.

The captain, clinging to the splintered rail on the foredeck, stood shouting his orders, his stentorian voice heard even above the roar of the elements. "Man the boats" was the order now given, though how a boat could live in that seething pit of hell I could not guess. As rapidly as possible the crews responded and the boats were swung out. One was smashed against the side of the ship and the other capsized as it struck the water, spilling its human freight into the sea. And now I think our captain must suddenly have gone mad, for, with uplifted fists and screaming an imprecation to the heavens above, he dived into the black depths that had claimed his crew.

I was left alone, clinging as best I could to whatever had not been washed overboard. How long I struggled against being swept into the sea I do not know, but at length the wind died down; but the first faint streaks of dawn told me as I gazed at the sharp tongue of rock which pierced our vitals, that I could not long remain aboard and live; for at any moment the ship might break. There was still one boat in the davits; so I hurriedly provisioned it from the cook's galley. The food and a plentiful supply of water I placed in the boat, and then set about

getting over the side. This was not so difficult, as the side of the ship on which the boat was swung had listed until it was almost at the water line. I cast off and slowly moved away, wallowing in the trough of the sea.

I had gone only a short distance when there occurred a boiling of the water; a geyser shot up, and ship and rock sank from sight. I was now in very truth alone. I had no compass or sextant; I could only trust that I would drift to land or the path of some ship left alive by the storm.

I AM going to keep a log. As near as I can determine I have now been adrift ten days. Our ship struck September thirteenth, on a Friday. This must be then September twenty-third. It has been a period of sleeping and awakening, the sun has burned steadily down upon me, and I have sheltered myself as best I could under the canvas boat covering.

Sept. 24th—I have seen no sail of any kind. I seem to be caught in some current carrying me steadily forward in the same direction.

Sept. 26th—I did not enter any happening in the log yesterday. Was it my imagination, born of my loneliness and despair, or did my fancy conjure up the veiled figure of my childhood? It seemed to sit there in the bow of the boat last night. Perhaps I am going mad.

Sept. 27th—Still drifting. It is getting colder.

Sept. 28th—Still colder. I cannot understand this. Could I be drifting toward the Antarctic circle? I must be traveling faster than I am aware of.

Later—I cannot date this for I have been very ill, and unconscious, and do not know how many days have elapsed. It is now very cold and I have had to wrap myself in the canvas covering my stores. I hope I am not deluding myself, but I seem to see the vague outlines of mountainous land. I am too weak to row. I can only let the sea carry me; perhaps it will cast me upon some strange shore.

Later—I am still steadily drifting. The land—for it is land—is nearer. It is too dark now to write further in this undated log.

THAT was the last entry I was fated to make in my log; for during the night I entered what seemed to be a subterranean passage. I had a feeling of being closed in, and the water seemed to be lapping against walls. I had given up hope of ever seeing the sky again, when suddenly I came out into a bay or habor surrounded by towering cliffs of ice. I could only gaze in amazement and wonder if in some bygone age this could be the crater of a volcano which the sea entered during the forming of the ice age, and so it has stood unchanged through countless centuries. High above the cliffs the moon, pale and full of distant mystery, shone down upon the icy water. And then, as I grew accustomed to the half-light, I made out the outlines of many ships all vague and silent, the shapes strange and different from any I had ever seen except in pictures of the old sailing-ships of my grandfather's day.

For the first time in weeks I pulled upon my oars. The ice seemed to draw away and make a lane of clear water, which I followed to the nearest ship, and as I drew closer a hope formed in my heart that I would find someone to share the now almost insupportable loneliness.

"Ahoy!" I called, as my boat touched the side of the ship, but only an echo came back to me, thrown from the towering cliffs. With numb fingers I made my boat fast to the rusted chain hanging from the ship's side, and then as I started to climb aboard I looked up at the almost obliterated name and with a feeling of

astonishment made out the lettering. The *Golden Girl!* My own grandfather's ship, and I of all the world knew now where that ship rested.

A chill ran down my spine, yet I crawled over the rail. The moonlight threw into relief the coiled ropes on the deck as I slowly made my way to the chartroom. I entered, and there seated at his table with the log-book open before him was a man. I spoke to him but received no answer. I laid my hand upon his shoulder but he did not move. Bending down, I peered into the bearded face, and it was the face I had seen in pictures in my childhood home. It was the face of my own grandfather, cold and immovable in death. The figure sat stony and rigid, the quill pen still held in the stiff fingers. I peered over his shoulder and read the last entry in the log before him; it was in the cramped handwriting I had seen in old letters and documents penned by my grandfather. I turned with tears coursing down my cheeks, and looked again at that kindly dead face, and then once more read the log's entry:

"*Dec. 8th, 1888*—I put over the side today all that was mortal of Leatherbreeches, otherwise James Coggswell the ship's carpenter. This freezing cold has done its work well. I will have to carry on as best I can, hoping that I may be delivered from this haunted harbor of lost souls. If only the storm had left us one boat I might find a way out. If I can endure this cold I will build a boat or raft and try to find——"

The entry stopped, broken off as though he had been interrupted. I left the chartroom and made an inspection of the deck; everything was shipshape and the deck as clean as though it had been holystoned that day. I returned to the chartroom and in the captain's quarters adjoining found his bunk neatly made up.

Somehow I was not made nervous by that dead presence outside. I felt almost as if he protected me from some evil which seemed to be all about me. I lay down and drew the covers up about my face and fell asleep almost at once. I was awakened by the ghostly sound of a ship's bell. It was one o'clock. And then my hair rose on my head, for I heard in that graveyard of dead ships the words: "All's well!" And then the culminating horror, for the chair was pushed back in the chartroom and I heard the measured tread of footsteps. I raised up my head and looked through the door and saw my dead grandfather come back to seeming life. My senses reeled and I fell back upon the pillow.

When next I opened my eyes it was daylight. I again looked through the door into the chartroom; once more that rigid figure sat there, the glassy eyes staring down at the log. I arose, wondering if it had all been hallucination born of the terrible experiences I had passed through. Quickly I left the captain's quarters and went on deck and looked over the harbor. The ships lay silent, wrapped in mystery, no sign of life or sound.

FROM the stores in my boat I made a frugal breakfast, after which I decided to investigate the nearest ship. I slid down the chain into my boat. The ice in the harbor moved restlessly, showing here and there lanes of clear water. I took the chance of being crushed between the ice cakes rather than remain on the *Golden Girl* with its silent watcher. After a long time, during which I stood in my boat poling with one oar through the icy lanes, I reached the other ship, made fast and clambered aboard. I looked about me. Oh, that I could erase from my memory the sight of what met my eyes! Sprawled about the deck were the dead members of what I now know to be that ship's unholy crew; one with a knife

in his breast, another with his head crushed and half his face torn away, while a third, whom I took to be the captain, stood with a marlin-spike in his hand, snarling down at the mutilated face, all frozen and immovable.

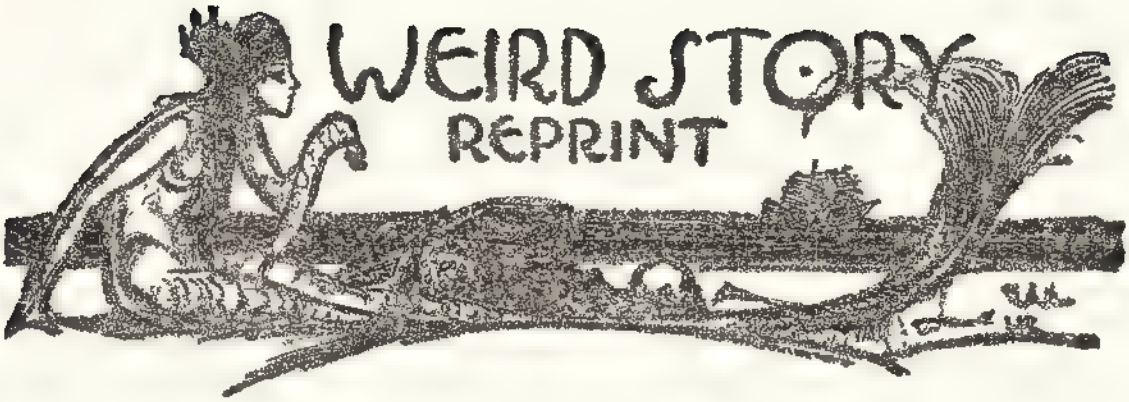
I ran, stumbling, to the side and half fell into my boat. The *Golden Girl* with its dead master seemed a friendly place, and glad I was when I once more stood upon its deck. I took the lantern from the taffrail, and going below found a few pieces of old lumber, with which I made a fire in the cook's galley. The awful cold has settled in my very marrow and I will try to warm myself as long as fuel lasts. Tonight I am resolved to stay awake and learn what I can of this strange harbor of ghosts. I must have dozed off despite my resolution; for the fire was out and there was a deadly chill in the air when I awoke.

Just then the ship's bell sounded one, and "All's well!" echoed over the harbor. I looked out, and lights flickered from the silent ships about me. I heard again the measured tread of footsteps from the chartroom and watched the figure of my grandfather come out.

He stood near me for a moment, looking across at the ship I had visited that day, and I heard the dead lips mutter: "How long, O Lord, how long?" Then he moved to the rail, where he stood as though listening to the terrible oaths and bloodthirsty yells which came from that other strange ship. Frozen with horror I too looked as lurid flames sprang up and revealed the fighting on that deck. All night long I watched the awful scenes repeated over and over until they died with the coming of dawn, as I have watched every night since, until now, when I feel that I too am doomed to become one of this ghastly company in the harbor of dead ships.

I have watched the dead man in the chartroom, in my loneliness have tried to talk to him, but he never turns his head to listen. I watch him go to the rail, stooping for something which he casts over the rail, perhaps the phantom form of Leatherbreeches the ship's carpenter; then that unholy ship whereon men go through the form of murder nightly. Oh, that I could not see the happenings there! but something impels me to look and listen.

It is bitter cold and I feel the chill reaching to my heart, and I have just enough life left to place what I have written in this bottle and cast it over the side, with the hope it will drift out of this ice-locked harbor and fare to the pathway of ships on the bosom of some sunny sea. After I have done this I will go to the chartroom and sit down by my dead grandfather and remain with him in his silent vigil, believing that when the chill which is nearing my heart reaches my brain, I too will become one of this ghostly company in this graveyard of lost ships, and when one o'clock comes I also will rise and walk again.



The Brain in the Jar*

By NORMAN ELWOOD HAMMERSTROM
and R. F. SEARIGHT

FOR the fifth time in less than an hour the call bell clanged noisily. Automatically Verne Eldridge, the orderly, rose from his chair and slipped silently down the dim-lit corridor of the old Berlin hospital. Merely another fretful patient demanding attention. Eldridge sighed. He possessed an adventure-loving soul and a capacity for daring which, during the war, had helped to make him one of the most trusted and efficient members of the American intelligence department, and which naturally enough chafed mightily under the monotony of his present forced inaction.

Not but that his position even now was sufficiently dangerous. Eldridge was well aware that he had escaped the Wilhelmstrasse agents by what seemed a miracle. He knew that as long as they believed him to be in Germany—and thus far there had been absolutely no opportunity for escape—they would be constantly on the alert for his capture and arrest. Though the armistice had been signed, Eldridge well knew that one who had done so much as himself toward the downfall of the Kaiser's forces would have earned the private vengeance of the imperialists. Even now he was convinced from certain veiled remarks that Doctor Jaeger, the physician in charge, suspected his secret. Eldridge was treading on very thin ice and was fully aware of the fact. He had been employed as orderly in the hospital for nearly two months now, posing as a wounded German soldier of whose papers he had possessed himself, and he knew that it was only a matter of time before the ruse would be discovered.

It was well into March of 1919. The night was cold and foggy, and fitful gusts of rain were dashed against the windows by the high wind which had come up at sunset. The gale moaned and shrieked among the towers and turrets of the ancient pile, which trembled slightly under the heavier shocks. A fitting night for murder and crime of all sorts, thought the impressionable Eldridge, as he sleepily made his way back to his room.

As he approached the stairs leading to the basement, he perceived Doctor Jaeger himself standing beside them in a rather

* From WEIRD TALES for November, 1924.

listless attitude. Although it was three o'clock in the morning, it was nothing unusual for the famous scientist and research worker to keep even later hours in his private laboratory. At present he was standing relaxed, smoking a cigarette, and no doubt planning his next day's research program. A slender, erect man of medium height was the doctor, with sharp, strong features accentuated by a neatly trimmed black beard. Rumors were afloat in scientific circles regarding certain experiments successfully carried out by Jaeger in the preservation of living tissues in special liquids, although as yet he had given out nothing to the world. The doctor had previously come into renown from several chemical innovations pertaining to the composition of some of the poison gases used by the German armies which he had perfected during the war. At present his position at the hospital was a sinecure, to aid him in carrying on extensive investigations in tissue preservation. So much Eldridge knew from the report of a fellow operative, since deceased. From his own observation he knew Jaeger to be a cold, hard man, utterly without scruples and having a deep vein of cruelty in his nature which manifested itself from time to time in various characteristic acts.

As Eldridge passed, the doctor gave him a short "good morning" and turned to descend the stairs. Doubtless, thought Eldridge, he was going to the basement for chemicals, having perhaps run out of some compound needed to complete the experiment which had kept him working so late.

Eldridge passed on and was turning down the corridor leading to his own room, when, above the roar of the wind and steady beat of the rain, a door slammed loudly. For a moment he failed to perceive its significance. Then he pulled up sharply and listened, for it dawned upon his sleepy mind that the noise had come from behind a door which he had always supposed to open on a fire escape. This was curious indeed, and his mind became instantly alert as he realized the possible significance of his discovery. His professional training and natural curiosity overcoming his caution, Eldridge stepped to the door and turned the knob.

The door proved to be unlocked and he entered quickly, closing it behind him. He found himself in a narrow hallway lit dimly by a single bulb in the ceiling. Fully resolved now to investigate the mystery of this part of the building, Eldridge passed quickly to the end of the corridor, where he found it turned sharply to the left. A few yards farther on he arrived at a second door, doubtless, he thought, the one which had slammed. He opened it cautiously and slipped in, the draft closing it after him.

He was in a fairly large room fitted up as a laboratory. A drop-light on one of the two large tables cast a circle of bright light over the table, leaving the rest of the room in deep shadow. As his eyes became accustomed to the shaded light, he saw that the place was lined with shelves holding row above row of chemical supplies as well as numerous glass containers of various sizes and shapes. These latter were filled with liquids in which floated, in perfect preservation, various parts of the human anatomy. The tables were littered with retorts, test-tubes, Bunsen burners, microscopes, surgical and dissecting instruments, in fact all the varied paraphernalia of the research chemist and physiologist. On the left was a small anteroom, and beside it and projecting partly in front of its doorway, was a large cage containing several full-grown guinea-pigs. An expensive X-ray outfit and various photographic apparatus stood in one corner.

It flashed on Eldridge's mind that he had stumbled on the private laboratory of Doctor Jaeger. He had never known the exact location of this room, and the doctor always entered it from his private office, which he invariably kept locked during his absence. No doubt, thought the spy, the anteroom led to the office. He quickly realized that his presence here was not without considerable danger, for the scientist would hardly have taken such elaborate precautions in regard to the privacy of his laboratory had he not had something to conceal. Eldridge began to feel decidedly nervous. The violently raging elements without did not help to dispel this feeling.

He had almost decided to retire and leave his investigation for a more favorable time, when his attention was arrested by a large glass jar, resting on a shelf above the rows of drugs and chemicals on the right wall. It caught his eye first through the elaborate apparatus connected with it, then by its contents.

The jar was spherical in shape, with a large circular mouth fitted with a ground glass stopper, having a German cross for a knob. Above was a large nickel-plated tank, and extending from it to the jar a slender glass tube controlled by a system of valves. Another tube, also fitted with valves, projected from the jar close to the base, disappearing into the wall. Both tubes were fitted with delicate thermometers.

Eldridge observed most of these details later. At present his attention was riveted upon the contents of the jar, which seemed to consist of a purple-black fluid. As he stared, the hue gradually changed to a deep red and slowly became clear. Then, in the depths of the jar, the amazed spy beheld two glowing red spots, gleaming through the murky liquid like the eyes of a wolf in the dark. Then, as the fluid became perfectly transparent, he saw what appeared to be two naked human eyes glaring down at him with ferocious intensity. He fell back aghast, staring in amazement at this phenomenon, and as he looked, the liquid slowly resumed its former opacity till it had regained the original purple-black hue. Then it again grew transparent and the whole phenomenon was repeated.

Three times Eldridge witnessed this curious change. Then, gathering his courage, he climbed up on the table nearer to the jar so that he was but a few feet from it, with his eyes on the same level. As the liquid cleared once more, he saw a human brain in perfect preservation, resting on a soft membranous cushion. The cushion lay on a glass pedestal which projected about half-way up from the bottom of the jar. Extending from the brain were two cords, which crossed each other and dropped to the bottom of the jar, terminating in the two human eyes that Eldridge had first seen in the semi-darkness of the laboratory. The hideous spectacle resembled a huge snail.

Eldridge had lost track of the of time since entering the strange and sinister laboratory of Doctor Jaeger, but now his subconscious alert senses detected the sound of a door slamming far down the outer corridor. It must be the doctor returning from the basement, Eldridge thought, and he hastily slipped from the table and out into the narrow hallway, being careful this time that the door did not slam.

As he reached the door opening into the outer corridor, he heard footsteps rapidly approaching, and slipped behind the door just as the doctor entered. Jaeger closed the door without a backward glance and hurried down the corridor. He passed the corner without turning his head, but Eldridge waited

until he heard the sound of the laboratory door closing, and then hurried to his room.

WHAT he had witnessed in Doctor Jaeger's secret laboratory had made a deep impression upon Eldridge, but it was some time before he had another opportunity to visit the weird room. The doctor always kept both doors locked, and doubtless only the late hour and his intention to return at once had caused him to relax his vigilance on the night Eldridge made his first visit. Furthermore, he was nearly always there in person, working on his endless experiments. But finally after nearly three weeks Jaeger was called to Carlsbad for a consultation, and Eldridge realized that his chance for closer investigation had come.

He waited until after midnight. Then, making sure that he was not observed, he unlocked the doors with skelcton keys and entered the laboratory. He found it very much as he had left it on his previous visit, except that the place was in total darkness. He located the switch by means of his pocket flash and turned on able drop-light. He had ascertained after his first visit that the room contained no windows that might show the illumination to anyone passing by outside, and in view of the doctor's absence, he thought himself fairly safe from interruption. He had brought a pad of paper and a pencil, and now seated himself on the table in order to bring his eyes nearer to the level of the jar, and proceeded to make a rapid sketch of the jar and its contents.

As he was putting the final touches to the drawing, he had a distinct and vivid impression that his name had been called. His auditory nerves had registered nothing; of that he was certain, but the impression was too real to be lightly dismissed. He glanced nervously about, but no other living thing was present, aside from the guinea-pigs in their cage.

Again came that vivid impression of his name being pronounced. He looked up to see the glaring eyes of the brain fading gradually from sight as the liquid in the jar grew opaque. As he stared, the fluid again regained its transparency and the glowing eyes seemed to be boring through his very brain. His head swam, he clutched at the table for support and then lost consciousness.

He returned to his senses as from a black void, with all the mental sensations of emerging from ether. He had no means of telling the length of time that had passed during his trance, but glancing at his watch he saw that it was only a little after one o'clock; so he concluded that it must have been brief.

Then, looking down at his sketch, he saw a line in French written across the bottom in his own handwriting. He was considerably surprized, not to say alarmed, and with a final glance at the eyes, now disappearing into the liquid, he turned to the door.

Suddenly he stopped with a gasp of terror. Suspended motionless in thin air, before his eyes, hung an empty test-tube. As he shrank back the tube dropped and crashed to pieces on the floor. Retaining only enough presence of mind to switch out the light, Eldridge ran from the laboratory, more frightened by this than by any other of the phenomena which he had witnessed. Translated, the message on his sketch proved to read: "Be in the laboratory tomorrow at midnight." Brief and to the point, thought Eldridge, and he gave much thought during the day to the curious communication.

He saw Doctor Jaeger returning from his consultation late in the afternoon, and with some misgivings he repaired to the laboratory at midnight armed with an automatic. He found the room empty.

Jaeger, tired by his journey, had retired early.

Seated again before the brain, the spy soon passed into a hypnotic trance precisely similar to the one he had undergone the night before. He emerged as on the previous occasion, as if from a black void, and looking down at his tablet, found that several sheets were closely covered with his handwriting in French. He hastened to his room and began to translate the script.

As he proceeded, horror and amazement at the gruesome tale halted him again and again, but he finally completed the task and the whole weird story lay before him. In the name of the dictator he recognized that of a famous French spy who had disappeared just before the signing of the armistice.

"MY NAME is Jean Perrin," read the script. "Possibly you have heard of me, Mr. Eldridge, for, with all modesty, I may say that my work did a great deal toward the downfall of the German forces. When I was finally captured and exposed on November fifth of last year, the Wilhelmstrasse officials swore vengeance upon me, peace or no peace. But I knew that my work was well done and that the end of the war could be but a few days off.

"Colonel Von Uhlman, head of the secret service, had me brought before him for a private interview in which he tried to extract from me full details regarding the extent of the information I had managed to furnish our leaders. Colonel Von Uhlman failed utterly in his purpose, and it enraged him to such an extent that he swore I should die on the day the war ended. I bowed mockingly as I left his presence, but though I never saw him again, he kept his word.

"All was bustle and confusion preceding the Great Day, but when it dawned it brought with it a dead quiet, which told me, in solitary confinement, better than any words could have done, that the thing we had waited and worked and died for during more than four long years had at last been accomplished.

"For safer keeping I was confined, not in the Berlin prison, but in a small room in a turret of the old castle of Prince Otto Von Machstein just outside Berlin. Two armed guards stood without my door day and night, and my food was passed to me through a small slide window in the door. They were taking no chances with Jean Perrin. It is with a little pardonable pride that I recall how carefully they watched me, and their conversation outside my door, which showed how they feared my escape. And it was to good purpose—for them. Much as I plotted, carefully as I searched my mind, there was no possible chance for freedom in the limited time given me. The Great Day of the armistice found me still a prisoner.

"Late that night a guard of eight came clanking down the corridor, their heavy boots raising echoes throughout the old castle. Their leader, a heavy-set, brutal-faced sergeant, unlocked the door for the first time in nearly a week and confronted me with an evil grin on his seared countenance. Perhaps he knew of the fate in store for me. I think so now.

"I made no resistance as they handcuffed my wrists and led me from the castle. In silence we entered an armored car, and after an hour or more of rapid driving arrived at this hospital.

"Through the long, dimly lit corridors the clanking guard preceded and followed me, and finally we reached the operating-room. The light was poor here, as elsewhere in the building, but in the center of the room stood the operating-table, illumined by a cold blue cone of light from the powerful electric lamp overhead. The

room seemed filled with doctors and nurses, shrouded in white, and at the head of the table stood an instrument-tray covered with the glittering paraphernalia of the surgeon. Ah, I shudder as I recall those fearful moments! I was seized and overpowered, for, handcuffed as I was, my resistance was feeble. Stripped of my clothes and attired in an antiseptic white gown, I was thrown upon the table and my hands and feet strapped to its legs. My head was strapped down, and then Doctor Jaeger, a cruel smile on his face (he had not yet donned his operating-mask like the others, though otherwise in full operating-attire), stepped up and addressed me.

"Oh, the horror of what that snake-blooded demon told me! It rings in my ears even now when I am past all caring. He told me of his successful experiments in keeping alive in his special fluids various parts of the human body. And I was to be the subject of his crowning experiment, an attempt to keep the human brain alive *and functioning!*

"Can you imagine the horror of that scene to me, a living, normal man? Can you picture that dim room, its atmosphere heavy with the odors of disinfectants and anesthetics, with the white-robed figures of doctors and nurses, shrouded to the eyes, flitting about silently as ghosts, as they prepared the instruments and anesthetics for this frightful crime? It was almost more than the human mind could endure, and I nearly lost my self-control. Then I read the meaning of the evil grin on Doctor Jaeger's face and knew that he was waiting for me to break down and beg for mercy. What pleasure so exquisite for him as to refuse it and perhaps make the torture worse in some way for the mere pleasure of gloating over my suffering? I gritted my teeth and swore that no cry, no sign of quailing, would they wring from me.

"Doctor Jaeger stared long and piercingly into my eyes. What he saw there must have convinced him of my determination, for he made an abrupt sign of disgust and gave the order for the anesthetic. I held myself rigid and taut as the ether nozzle was placed over my nose and mouth, shutting out from my lungs for ever the oxygen that gives life. But I breathed deeply of the lethal fumes, for oblivion was heaven after that scene of hell.

"I SHALL never know, I suppose, just how long my consciousness was suspended. I do not think it was more than a few days, but again it might have been weeks. My first sensations were too frightful for description. I can give but a poor idea of the agony I endured. But it was all in one place, seemingly within my cranium. Alas, I did not know then that my cranium was reduced to ashes! A million demons might have been stabbing at my brain with red-hot needles. Darkness, a terrible roaring, were all about. Is this the end? I thought. Am I in the abode of the damned? For the torture of those moments seemed to me impossible except in the place taught by the faith of my childhood to be the final home of evil. Thought, concentration, were impossible. I have only the memory of the sensations. The noise increased, grew unbearable. A cracking, shrieking roar, mounting higher and higher, seemed about to split the ear-drums I no longer had. Then oblivion for another indeterminate period. With returning consciousness the symptoms gradually subsided, and at length I was able to observe an alternate change of light to darkness and darkness to light occurring about once every two minutes. During the light periods I became able to distinguish objects, and slowly I regained my normal power of vision. I saw that

I was in a large and fully equipped laboratory—the room in which you are sitting tonight. But what was my horror to perceive in a mirror on the opposite wall, not myself as I had been in life, but this glass jar wherein you see me, and within it my own brain and eyeballs attached thereto by their nerve cords. And then I knew that Jaeger's accursed experiment had succeeded. I, my living brain, was functioning in his liquid. Far better, I thought, had death claimed me.

"From then on I lived in a world devoid of all sensations of sound, odor or feeling. My first terrible agonies had been due to the irritation of the ends of the severed spinal cord and sensory nerves. Nothing was left me now but my sense of sight—thanks to the surgical skill of that ingenious fiend.

"The eternal silence was oppressive, maddening. I prayed for death in vain, for I possessed no material body with which to execute self-destruction. My mind and personality were helplessly chained to this lump of clay called the brain.

"Then I found something to live for.

"Every day the doctor comes to work long hours at his experiments, sometimes with chemicals, test-tubes and retorts, sometimes with tissue and microscopes or again with strange photographic apparatus. And every night before he leaves he comes and stares at me for many minutes. He knows that the tissue of my brain lives, but as yet he has found no way of determining whether or not it functions. And it pleases me to keep him in ignorance, for the day of my vengeance is very near. That is what I have found to live for.

"I have learned a great deal since my incarceration here; among other things, that Doctor Jaeger, whatever may be his nature and personal character, is one of the world's great scientists, a specialist in many things, in all of which he excels. I have learned, too, something of the manner in which I am kept alive here. The tube leading into the jar from above connects with the nickel tank, which contains a supply of the secret fluid. The valves are arranged to let the fluid pass very slowly through the jar, finding egress through the lower valves and out through the tube which they control. The liquid is nutritious and at body temperature. A subtle, periodic chemical reaction causes the color change, designed to protect my naked eyes from the light. Beyond the fact that the fluid has a chemical similarity to human blood and contains a colorless compound carrying oxygen, I have no knowledge of its composition.

"But I have learned much more than this. With nothing to do, week after week, I have worked at the one thing that was left to me. I have developed my will-power. From the will of an ordinary man I have increased its strength till my powers now would astound any psychologist—even those who suspect the possibilities of the human will. And I have used it to the harm of the enemy, though my only aim now is my personal vengeance on Jaeger. In the last week there have been twelve murders, six suicides and eight insanity cases, all of noted German officials of the worst type. Among them was Colonel Von Uhlman. These acts were all caused by the hypnotic suggestions which I have made by telepathy.

"And I have advanced even farther than this. I have done what has never been accomplished before. Today my will is so highly developed that by simply exerting it I can move small objects. The suspended flask you saw last night was a demonstration. Were I to continue, the time would come soon when nothing would be impossible for me. My powers

(Please turn to page 758)

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE room was large, high-vaulted, and lit by a dim window looking forth between unpruned cypresses toward the black sea. No flames arose from the myriad lamps to assist that baffled daylight; and shadows brimmed the place like a spectral fluid, through which the vessels of wizardry, the great censers and alembics and braziers, seemed to quiver like animate things. A little past the room's center, his back to the doorway, Vacharn sat on an ebon trivet before the mirror of clairvoyance, which was wrought from electrum in the form of a huge delta, and was held obliquely aloft by a serpentining copper arm. The mirror flamed brightly in the shadow, as if lit by some splendor of unknown source; and the intruders were dazzled by glimpses of its radiance as they went forward.

It seemed that Vacharn had indeed been overcome by the wonted trance, for he peered rigidly into the mirror, immobile as a seated mummy. The brothers held back, while Yadar, thinking them close behind him, stole toward the necromancer with lifted blade. As he drew nearer, he perceived that Vacharn held a great simitar across his knees; and, deeming that the sorcerer was perhaps forewarned, Yadar ran quickly up behind him and aimed a powerful stroke at his neck. But, even while he aimed, his eyes were blinded by the strange brightness of the mirror, as though a sun had blazed into them from its depth across the shoulder of Vacharn; and the blade swerved and bit slantingly into the collar-bone, so that the necromancer, though sorely wounded, was saved from decapitation.

Fierce and swift as a wounded tiger, he leapt from the trivet, swinging his simitar aloft as he turned upon Yadar. . . .

You will not want to miss this utterly strange, spine-chilling story about the dead people that swam in the ocean and served the sorcerers of Naat; and of the living-dead maiden Dalili. It will be printed complete in the July issue of WEIRD TALES:

NECROMANCY IN NAAT

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WHEN THE WORLD SLEPT

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A thrilling weird-scientific tale about the catastrophe that put the whole world into a strange slumber.

July Weird Tales . . . . . Out July 1

The Brain in the Jar

(Continued from page 756)

would be such that I might rule the world through strength of will. But I have no desire for that. Existence is misery, and when I have accomplished my revenge I shall be glad to leave life, in earnest this time.

"It is by means of my telepathic power that I have thrown you into the hypnotic trance which now claims you, and, using your hand, have written down my story. If you would witness my vengeance on Doctor Jaeger, conceal yourself in the small room behind the guinea-pig cage tomorrow night. Be there by nine o'clock, as Jaeger, whose mind I read, will come soon after."

THUS ended a manuscript which surpassed by far in grisly horror, gruesome detail and stark improbability anything that Eldridge had ever imagined possible. He passed the day as though in a trance, his mind running constantly on the extraordinary communication. He had no doubts, after the first natural questionings of his mind, as to the authenticity of the strange message, and so nine o'clock found him concealed as directed, with his automatic ready.

He had not been long hidden when Doctor Jaeger entered from his office and without looking around set about his work. He began slicing, for microscopic examination, tissue from a living human arm taken from one of the jars. A half-hour or more passed, broken only by an occasional cough or exclamation of satisfaction from the doctor as the examination proceeded, apparently to his complete satisfaction. Eldridge did not grow impatient. The uncanny affair held him enthralled.

Then a slight movement above the doctor's head caught his eye. For the first time he noticed a huge wax bottle of hydrofluoric acid on a shelf directly over that section of the table whereon the scientist was engaged. Jaeger had been using the deadly stuff for certain silicon determinations of the tissue.

Again the slight movement, and now Eldridge saw that it was this bottle sliding forward a few inches. Slowly, all but imperceptibly, so as not to alarm the worker below, it slid forward toward the edge of the shelf. Unconsciously Eldridge estimated the distance it must fall to reach the doctor—some five or six feet. Involuntarily he was tempted to warn the unsuspecting physician, but the glittering eyes of the brain seemed to render his will powerless.

The bottle was now projecting some inches beyond the edge of the shelf. Eldridge started to cry out, but found himself unable to speak. He tried to rise but was unable to move a muscle. Suddenly the doctor looked up, perhaps warned by some premonition of his impending doom. If so, it came too late. Into his eyes came the look of a hunted animal as he saw the jar of deadly acid poised directly over his head. The bottle came hurtling downward as he started to rise and struck him full in the face, smashing to bits, while the acid gushed over his body. He fell to the floor writhing and shrieking in his death agony. The vengeance of Jean Perrin was accomplished.

Meanwhile the acid vigorously attacked the woodwork and glassware, and flames soon sprang up from the heat of the reaction. A bottle of sodium exploded and row after row of bottles came crashing down, their chemical contents adding fuel and impetus to the flames.

Eldridge's escape by the corridor had been cut off from the first, and the scene held him fascinated. He made no attempt

to leave through the doctor's office as he might have done at first. His present position had become one of great danger, owing to the explosive nature of some of the chemicals which had not yet been touched by the flames. The laboratory was rapidly becoming a raging inferno. High above all stood the jar and its contents, which had brought this thing to pass. The red eyes of the brain glittered triumphantly through the smoke and flames.

Jaeger had become motionless. Then suddenly the shelf gave way and brain and jar crashed into the fire and disappeared. Long tongues of flame shot up to the very ceiling. Then came a bursting roar; a flying bottle struck Eldridge on the temple and oblivion descended.

When Eldridge returned to consciousness, he found himself swathed in bandages on board a hospital ship bound for New York. His wife was with him, also his friend and co-worker, Felton, of the secret service, who, with a detachment sent from the American Army of Occupation, had effected his rescue from the burning hospital.

To them he related his weird tale, and with shattered nerves and seared body resigned himself to his wife's loving care. Her love alone can efface from his mind the effects of the memory of the vengeance of the brain in the jar.

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ONE year ago we broadened the scope of this magazine to include a weird detective story in each issue of WEIRD TALES, and asked you, the readers, whether you approved. Quite decidedly, you did NOT approve. Except for the stories about Doctor Satan, every detective tale we have printed has called forth hoots of derision and a grand chorus of boos, beginning with the Craig Kennedy story about the giant blood-sucking cat in our May number, last year. Doctor Satan is so weird a villain, and such an astounding master of occult knowledge, that the stories about him have built up a strong following among you, the readers. Perhaps this is because the emphasis is put on the criminal instead of the criminologist; but we suspect that it is due to the fact that the Doctor Satan stories are weird tales *per se*, and do not depend on the detective angle for their fascination. So long as Mr. Ernst continues to write such absorbing weird tales about this character, the world's weirdest criminal; and so long as you, the readers, continue to like them, we will continue to print stories about Doctor Satan; but the other type of detective tale will cease to appear in this magazine. You who object to detective stories in WEIRD TALES have won your fight. In this issue, *Loot of the Vampire* would classify as a weird tale, with or without the intrusion of detectives into the story.

No More Detective Stories

A letter from John Malone, of Jackson, Mississippi, is typical of many scores of letters opposing detective stories in WEIRD TALES: "You've printed four stories lately that have caused much disrespectful comment. You know them—*The Death Cry, The Blue Woman, The Man with the Blue Beard*, and—the worst—*Coils of the Silver Serpent*. The last two were of such low standard that they reminded me of 'penny horribles' once so popular. The others (print this, please, and perhaps it will save you much panning) had some claim to be called weird, so there is some slight excuse for their printing. But *Coils of the Silver Serpent* had no claim to weirdness and was just plain trash. Even the cover design illustrating it was out of place. But enough of this. . . . You've started 1936 in a swell way. The magazine is neat and nice (with the illustrations by Finlay and Napoli contributing greatly to this) and the stories are unsurpassable. I hope you keep it up. In the April issue, every story was as fine as fine could be. And there was a nice balance, too. One science-fiction novel (in part), one tale based on mythology, a tale of witchcraft, a tale of zombies *(They Shall Rise)*, a weird-adventure novel (concluding part), a tale of horror, a ghost story, a spiritualistic story, and a story of the Orient."

Well-Balanced Assortment

B. M. Reynolds, of North Adams, Massachusetts, writes: "I was particularly pleased with two of the stories in the March issue. *The Crystal Curse* by the Binder brothers was an unusual and striking tale, easily taking first place in the issue. Here's hoping we see plenty more of their work in the future. *In the World's Dusk* by Edmond Hamilton was unique and original. Of late, Hamilton is turning out some of his best work. The current April number was tip-top, containing a well-balanced assortment of good reading. *The Ruler of Fate* by Jack Williamson got off to a good start and I know the succeeding installments will be equally fine. Williamson never disappoints. His *Golden Blood* was one of the finest tales ever written. Ronal Kayser created a master-

piece in *The Seance*, a good piece of writing with a denouement like the kick of a mule. *The Rajah's Gift* by Price was well worth reprinting. Mr. Price's ability to portray the East in all its glamor and grimness is certainly unsurpassed. . . . Carl Jacobi also rang the bell with *The Face in the Wind*, a worthy successor to *Revelations in Black*. The old legends of the past can certainly be reworked into a most extraordinary type of story. . . . Nominations for reprints: *The Girl from Samarcand*, *The Moon Bog*, *Bimini*, *The Arctic Death*, *The Space-Eaters* and *The Golden Whistle*."

For Her Small Daughter

Wanda Pascuzzi, of Spokane, writes: "I have not missed a copy of WT since I discovered it in 1933. I am keeping them all for my small daughter to read when she grows up, providing the pictures in them don't scare her to death before she learns to read. I think the covers with the black background are the most striking. The Doctor Satan stories remind me of some books I read by Sax Rohmer, in which the fiend always met his end, to all appearances, at the end of the book, only to reappear wilder and woollier than ever in the next book."

WT, Collier's, Time

E. A. Taylor, of West Asheville, North Carolina, writes: "This is the first letter I have ever written to any magazine. I am writing to tell you how much I like WT. I have been reading it, off and on, ever since back in 1926, and for the last two years I have been a constant reader. Your magazine, Collier's, and Time are the only three magazines I buy regularly; so you can see how I rate you. Robert E. Howard with his tales of Conan the Barbarian is by far your finest author. C. L. Moore is a close second, and Clark Ashton Smith with his tales of ancient lands is third. Personally I prefer tales of the far past, such as the Conan and Jirel of Joiry stories. Your new illustrator, Virgil Finlay, is fine."

An Uneasy Touch of Goose-Flesh

Thurston Topham, of Montreal, writes: "I have been a reader of your delightful

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.
Feb.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.
....	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.
Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	Apr
....	May	May	May	May
June	June	June	June	....
July	July	July	July	....
Aug.	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.	....
Sept.	....	Sept.	Sept.	....
Oct.	....	Oct.	Oct.	....
Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	....
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These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

WEIRD TALES

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publication from its early days and, like many of your correspondents, I hope you will preserve its weirdness and not allow it to deteriorate into the pseudo-scientific-detective-horror type of magazine. A would-be weird story which finishes with too much explanation is no longer weird. The thrill is gone. The unexplainable, yet plausible, that leaves the reader with an uneasy touch of goose-flesh and prickling of the scalp, that is what the connoisseur of weird stories looks for."

Years of Interesting Reading

J. F. MacDuffee, of Portland, Maine, writes: "Permit me to thank you as the editor of WEIRD TALES for many years of interesting reading. Although you will not find my name on your subscription lists I have read *every* Weird Tale from kiver to kiver since they first appeared on the stands. This letter is principally to thank you and through you Robert E. Howard for the *first* 100 percent weird serial I have ever read—*The Hour of the Dragon.* Unless one excepts Edgar Rice Burroughs, whose stories are bizarre rather than weird, I know of no modern author capable of maintaining the high degree of expectancy that Howard has through every page of this exceptional story. Not many months ago I found an old WEIRD TALES magazine that I had not passed along (today I regret that I ever did) and think that they were even better in those days. Since then you have published some gems—Conan, Northwest Smith, etc.—that rank at the top of the list. It made me wonder if you wouldn't find it profitable to get out a few volumes of the shorter weird stories reprinted from old WEIRD TALES. Sound out your reading public and see how many would purchase."

One Rainy Day

Robert Hoyer, of Chicago, writes: "I have always been a reader of weird, mysterious fiction but was only able to gratify my passion for it occasionally when I accidentally ran across such fiction in one of the numerous books and magazines of which I have been a constant reader. One rainy day when there was absolutely nothing to do I went to the bookstore to purchase a new magazine. You see, I am so avid a reader that I always finish my regular diet of monthly publications within a week of their appearance on the stands. Prominent on the racks were a few copies of WEIRD TALES. The title enthralled me. I bought a copy; took it home; and began to read. That day was four years ago this month of April, but I've never forgotten the sheer joy I experienced after I'd finished the first few stories and discovered that at last I'd found a steady source of my favorite type of fiction. Since then I've had the pleasure of reading so many wonderful stories in WEIRD TALES that it is a constant source of wonder to me that I've never taken the time to write to the Eyrie and congratulate you on them. Of course there were some stories that I didn't particularly care for; I realize that it is unavoidable, there being so many other readers besides myself to please, but these stories were by far in the minority. Well, four years is a long time in these fast-moving days, so on the fourth anniversary of my introduction to WEIRD TALES I've decided to perform this pleasurable but often deferred duty of giving my opinion of your magazine. I have just finished the April 1936 issue of WEIRD TALES. The serial *The Ruler of Fate* has started out very well, but as I seldom deliver judgment on an incomplete story I will say no more about this tale. Taking the Conan serial as a whole I nominate it as my first choice for the best story in the issue. This tale ran true to the Howard tradition, which is saying a lot. Besides, Conan is my favorite character in WEIRD TALES. For second place I choose *Son of Satan* by Arlton Eadie. It was truly a gem in weird fiction, interesting, concise, and with a snappy, fitting climax. After reading this story I can understand the sorrow news of Arlton Eadie's death must have caused you and his weird fiction audience. In my opinion the third best tale was *The Druidic Doom.* The description in the list of contents expresses it better than I could, 'A gripping tale of a *hideous horror* beneath the Druid stone.' My fourth and fifth selections are: *The Face in the Wind* and *They Shall Rise.* Lastly I must remark on the reprint, *The Rajah's Gift.* It was my idea of a good reprint. In fact, I've noticed that lately your selection of reprints has been continuously improving. Keep it up. This story made me regret that I wasn't reading WEIRD TALES eleven years ago at the time it was first published. That just about winds up my comments on the April issue. Allow me to offer you my felicitations on it. In the good old American slang it was a 'wow'. A last

word on WEIRD TALES in general. Not many readers mention the Eyrie in their letters. To me the Eyrie seems to give a friendly impression to the whole magazine. It seems to make the magazine more the readers'. They feel that they have something to say about the whole magazine and that they can get the type of stories they want in it. I say, 'Long life to the Eyrie.' If I won't be too much of a nuisance, I intend to write more regularly to the Eyrie from now on."

Every Story a Winner

Charles H. Bert, of Philadelphia, writes: "The April issue was marvelous! Every story was good! Cover splendid! and inside illustrations superb! I am at a loss to choose the three best stories from so many good ones, but I believe first place should be given to *The Face in the Wind* by Carl Jacobi for its striking unusualness. It is comparable to *Charon* of last year. I believe, never before have I encountered a story in WEIRD TALES which used the harpies of ancient Greek mythology as characters. I'm eagerly waiting for more by Carl Jacobi. *Son of Satan* by Arlton Eadie deserves second place. I was surprized at finding a story by him, as I thought *The Carnival of Death* was his last one. His untimely death has taken away one of your best English authors. The reprint, *The Rajah's Gift* by E. H. Price, was superb. Oriental stories are a rarity in WEIRD TALES, and this one was welcomed by me. The Eastern asmosphere was *real* and Price depicts it faithfully. Owen catches the Eastern atmosphere in his stories too. I found Bloch's *Druidic Doom* far superior to his recent story, and his best since *The Feast in the Abbey. . . . The Hour of the Dragon,* by Robert E. Howard, ends with Conan slaughtering his enemies. In my opinion, the stories of Solomon Kane and King Kull are superior to the Conan stories, and I, for one, prefer them. Howard reached the peak of his creative genius in those stories of King Kull and Solomon Kane. Don't you think it is about the right time to reprint *The Shadow Kingdom?* . . . Nominations for reprints: *The Abysmal Horror* by B. Wallis, *Invaders from Outside* by J. Schlossel, *The Hall Bedroom* by E. Backus, and *The Ghoul and the Corpse* by G. A. Wells. How about a reprint edition?"

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The Brundage Covers

Robert Oberon, of Denmark, Maine, writes: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES for about three years now, and like it very much. It is of a much higher class than the common pulps that you find on the news stands. I do not care for the Doctor Satan stories as they seem too much alike; though I have read and liked several of Paul Ernst's other works. Two stories that have impressed me in recent issues are *The Graveyard Rats* and *The Druidic Doom*, the latter written by Robert Bloch, who seems to be a very promising young writer. Brundage, your cover artist, certainly knows how to blend colors. I usually spend ten or fifteen minutes in just studying the different shades and designs. Maybe it is because I am sort of an amateur artist myself. Though I would hate to see Brundage replaced, I wonder how Virgil Finlay's work would look in colors on the cover. Here's best wishes for the greatest magazine of its kind on the market today."

The Tree of Life

Henry Kuttner, of Beverly Hills, California, writes: "Derleth, Bloch, Jacobi get the honors in April WT. Derleth for creepy realism; Bloch for eery Lovecraftsmanship; Jacobi for a very neat yarn about the harpies. I've got a weakness for mythic monsters in modern weird fiction. Also high praise for Utpatel's illustration to *They Shall Rise*—striking and effective. Whatever happened to Moore's advertised *Tree of Life?* Did you run it under another title?" [No, *The Tree of Life* has not yet been run, but will appear soon.—THE EDITOR.]

Jules de Grandin

John V. Baltadonis, of Philadelphia, writes: "The cover of the April issue, instead of being good as it usually is, was more than that, it was a 'pip'. This is the first time Mrs. Brundage has used green for a long time. As yet I haven't read the new serial, *The Ruler of Fate;* however, I look forward to reading it. The best story in the issue was *The Face in the Wind.* Closely following upon this tale was *Son of Satan.* Not counting the shorts, the worst in the issue was *They Shall Rise;* it had an old plot and wasn't so well written as the others. *The Druidic Doom* was Bloch's best since *The Feast in the Abbey.* The shorts were all fair. What about that eloquent character, Jules de Grandin? I miss him a lot. I hope to read of him in the near future." [Jules de Grandin has become one of the most popular characters in weird fiction. In the future, as in the past, WEIRD TALES will publish fascinating stories of his exploits.—THE EDITOR.]

An Astounding Issue

Robert A. Madle, of Philadelphia, writes: "The April issue surprized me; in fact, it astounded me. The stories were so outstanding that I haven't a solitary thing to complain about. Although it is difficult to choose the best story in such a superb issue, I rate *Son of Satan* by Arlton Eadie the most interesting story in the issue. Although the aforementioned tale was most interesting, Jacobi's *The Face in the Wind* was the weirdest and most scariest yarn. Brundage's cover design was excellent as usual."

Correspondents Wanted

Nils Helmer Frome, Box 3, Fraser Mills, British Columbia, writes: "Some of your illustrators are punk, but strangely they are not bad in certain kinds of drawing. Virgil Finlay is a master of the art—I doff my hat to him, and every hat in the future that I possess. . . . *Norn* was one of the best stories I have read for a long time. My favorite writers are Clark A. Smith, Edmond Hamilton, Paul Ernst and Eando Binder. They never slacken, but still don't turn out stuff that is quick and rough. . . . If you would please print this, and put my address, I would like to have correspondents, especially those interested in writing and drawing. You may wonder why I haven't mentioned the covers—oh, the covers! Well, I am indifferent. Let other people make fools of themselves if they wish. I would be more intrigued if Mrs. Brundage drew a monotonous gray stone in place of every off-colored lopsided nude. There now!"

Eye-Widening Horror

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes: "Dear, dear, here 'tis a week since I finished the April WT and I suddenly awoke to the fact that I haven't sent my monthly letter of say-so. It sims to me *The Ruler of Fate* is gonna be mighty good. I like a bit of science-fiction—but not too much—not the kind that goes into detail almost turning the story into an instruction sheet. Science-fiction is ok by me. Now I know what a harpy

is—I often wondered. Thanx to Carl Jacobi I have learned—thanx, too, for his *The Face in the Wind*. It was really gruesome. I think I like harpies better than vampires. 'Stoo bad Arlton Eadie is no longer among those present. His stories were always good, and although *Son of Satan* is a short story, I found it right to my taste—olden times in Venice—carnival time, too—devil worship—selling souls and all that—I revel in it (tsk—what a morbid person!). What d'ye s'pose the secret was the doctor possessed? I'll bet he was a seventh son—with that name of his—Septimus. Narsty man—why couldn't he be nice about it all? and not come around at midnite—waking the dead? It was all rite—Messers Derleth and Schorer. Ahaaaaaa!!! And then I laid down my WT after having read the conclusion of *The Hour of the Dragon*—with a sigh of satisfaction—as of accomplishing a thing well done. The whole story was brimful of excitement, fun, eye-widening horror—it's just about the best I've ever read in WT. Mr. Howard certainly created a dynamic character when he introduced Conan. One thing I noticed a bit out of order—Conan asked for Zenobia to rule as his queen. I wonder how long that will last? I wanna know what it was that took Mr. or rather Sir Charles into the pit—I wanna know what was in the pit—I do!! I like Druid stories but I never seem to learn enough about the ancient Druids. The shorter tales were all right but I can't seem to find any further comments on them—ditto the reprint. My favorite stories center around ancient times—from the aforementioned Druids down through the Middle Ages. A good issue—this April one."

The Blue Woman

E. L. Mengshoel, of Minneapolis, writes: "Gathering from a letter to the Eyrie by one Mr. Ormsbee, I understand that 'weird' to him means something beyond any possibility of explanation, beyond any hope of solution by either science or religion or any process of thought; in short, beyond reason. To satisfy such requirements for 'weirdness,' I cannot think of anything better than hasheesh dreams, or delirium tremens, or probably the vagaries of sheer dementia. Well, such matter may appeal to some minds—even to many, for all I know; however, that is a kind of 'weirdness' which is beyond me to enjoy

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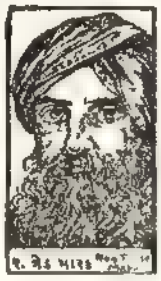

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or get interested in, and which also, for example, has made me give up reading the vertiginous fantasy flights of Jirel of Joiry. I'll readily admit that these stories, as well as all the rest of the tales in your magazine, are exceedingly well written, artistically very cleverly executed; but even so, well, ordinary people soon tire of the entirely meaningless. I read Hamilton whenever he finds our own Earth good enough for his experimental field; but I keep away from his space-ships and his pipe-dreamy travels among distant or non-existent planets and solar systems with known or fictitious names. Neither can I find much interesting about Northwest Smith and his pals, who are quite ordinary terrestrial types of 'foreigners,' though palmed off as natives of Venus, which is too hot, and of Mars, which is too cold, for anything like human beings. Those kinds of fiction may be most entertaining, though, to people that know nothing at all about astronomy, or have never heard anything about cosmic facts and phenomena; just as Santa Claus tales are interesting to small children. However, your magazine, of course, has to appeal to all classes of readers, and so it does, I think, very successfully. I was very much delighted to find, in your February issue, a reprint of one of Lovecraft's stories. He is incomparable, and I wish there would be more by him in WT, and also by such excellent story-makers as Bassett Morgan, Doctor Keller, Greye La Spina, and that brilliant 'Arab', E. Hoffmann Price. Oriental and jungle mystery stories are my favorite ones, by the way. Contrary to other writers in the Eyrie, I found *The Blue Woman* in your September issue a story of outstanding fascination, and the more so because it is built on a tragedy that has actually taken place. A watch manufacturing company (in New Jersey?) some years ago, it will be remembered, became involved in legal procedure on account of half a dozen of their women workers having caught the fatal radium necrosis by using their lips to point the paint-brushes with which they painted the hands and numbers on the watch-dials with radium, to make them luminous. As the criminal negligence of the directors and managers, in not warning the girls of the dangerous properties of radium, was the direct cause of their terrible disease and subsequent death, one can hardly help wishing that the quite logical sequel to that tragic event as presented by your story-writer had been something more than fiction, too! In conclusion, let me compliment Mrs. Brundage for that splendid nude with which she adorned the cover of that issue as illustration to that story just mentioned. And, by all means, let her continue with her nudes offending the prudes!"

Botany of Northwest Smith

W. A. Betikofer, of Washington, D. C., writes: "Having read WEIRD TALES for approximately ten years with the lapse of only a very few issues, there have been recent circumstances which lead me to offer what I believe a constructive criticism, and a suggestion which I hope you may adopt at some future time. The stories of Doctor Satan do not, in my opinion, belong in a magazine such as yours. Differing though they do from the ordinary type of detective story, yet their appeal does lie to one primarily interested in such material; and so I hope emphatically that Doctor Satan will stay permanently dead. Much the same comment applies to practically all interplanetary stuff. *Satan in Exile* and its sequels were not the type of fiction which seems best suited to your magazine, and Edmond Hamilton is much better when he stays down on Earth than when he goes messing about in space. C. L. Moore is the *one* author who writes interplanetary stories that deserve a place in your magazine. However, I hope it will not be construed as idle fault-finding to point out one botanical error in the story of Northwest Smith on the asteroid where men's souls were changed to those of beasts. He refers to plants of the steaming tropical jungle as more primitive, millions of years in evolution behind the highland vegetation. As a matter of fact, the insect-catching plants, orchids, and those possessing power to move their organs at will are far more highly specialized and adapted to specific conditions, and more advanced in the scale of organic evolution, than any such trees as those of our Northern forests. The suggestion I had in mind is this: When any author has written a succession of especially fine stories, why not collect the masterpieces of that particular author in a small, permanently-bound volume about three-fourths the size of WEIRD TALES and place it on sale? I would suggest also a limited edition on fine paper with illustrations in color, *to be sold unbound* so the purchaser can ar-

range locally for such bindings as he wishes and can afford. Among the authors whose works I would like to see so collected are Robert E. Howard's stories of Cormack FitzGeoffrey (which appeared in ORIENTAL STORIES), his stories of war in the Middle Ages, and especially those of Conan; E. Hoffmann Price's stories of Sultan Schamsed-din and the Pious Companions; Bassett Morgan's South Sea tales, and C. L. Moore on Northwest Smith. My reason for desiring a more compact selection of your best stories is that, naturally, most readers are more interested in one type of story than in others, and even WEIRD TALES contains some stories that do not appeal to all. My locker at the Washington Canoe Club is stuffed with back issues of WEIRD TALES to such an extent that many were ruined by the recent floods (when water was three feet deep on our second story), and it would be of the greatest convenience to be able to obtain the sifted pickings of their contents in a few small volumes and discard the bulky back issues. Incidentally, my locker was broken into last fall and several dollars' worth of magazines stolen—which demonstrates the esteem in which your fine publication is held even among the unprincipled."

Her Favorite Magazine

Mrs. E. Russell, of Sacramento, California, writes: "I could go to great length to tell you what I think of my favorite magazine, but will just say that I wouldn't trade WT for all the other publications on the market, and there are some very good ones. I read it from cover to cover and find no fault with the majority of the stories, but do not care for weird-scientific fiction. Please do not give us detective stories unless they are weird. The Doctor Satan stories are great. Clark Ashton Smith is a favorite of mine."

Concise Comments

Edison Avery Price, of New York City, writes: "I have been greatly disappointed at the absence of Clark Ashton Smith from WT for several months, as I am growing more and more convinced that he is your most unique author. Quite a number of your readers seem to concur in this. Incidentally, he seems to be eminently equipped for the translation of Baudelaire." [Clark Ashton Smith has appeared in nine out of the last twelve issues. Another story by him will appear next month.—THE EDITOR.]

NEXT MONTH

RED NAILS

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

HERE is the story you have been waiting for: the weirdest story yet written about that strange character, Conan the barbarian adventurer and soldier of fortune—Conan in love—Conan trapped in the weird roofed city inhabited by the most peculiar race of people ever spawned—Conan mated with a redoubtable woman pirate, Valeria of the Red Brotherhood.

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Samuel Gordon, of Washington, D. C., writes: "In *They Shall Rise*, by Derleth and Schorer, the silver bullet slays another dead-alive. What's wrong with gold, radium or platinum? Of course the cadaverous doctor, born in the last century, couldn't be expected to know the wonders of radium."

Earl S. Peirce, Jr., of Washington, D. C., writes: "In a recent issue, Henry Kuttner is great stuff. The spring renaissance has definitely brought out the 'unique' angle of WT. Meaning of course—Bloch, Quinn, Jacobi, and the Derleth-Schorer combine."

Constance Gill, of St. John, New Brunswick, writes: "I get the WEIRD TALES magazine every month, and I enjoy them very much. In the March issue I liked especially *The Albino Deaths*, and the very short story, *The Ship that Committed Suicide*."

John Spratt, of Dallas, Texas, writes: "I should like to take this opportunity of thanking you for your singularly satisfying magazine. It is a relief to escape from the prosaic efforts of the majority of present-day writers to a realm where imagination, man's distinguishing attribute, reigns in complete supremacy."

Robert Bloch writes from Milwaukee: "*The Rajah's Gift* was a fine reprint. I always look forward to E. Hoffmann Price's little *vignettes orientales*. They hold the same glamor as Frank Owen's beautiful fantasies of China. Let's have more of them, with Hugh Rankin's delicate illustrations to embody the tenuous glamor of the East."

Robert E. Howard writes from Cross Plains, Texas: "Enthusiasm impels me to pause from burning spines of cactus for my drouth-bedeviled goats long enough to give three slightly dust-choked cheers for the April cover illustration. The color combination is vivid and attractive, the lady is luscious, and altogether I think it's the best thing Mrs. Brundage has done since she illustrated my *Black Colossus*. And that's no depreciation of the covers done between these master-pictures. I must also express my appreciation to Mr. Napoli, who has done a splendid job of illustrating my serial. I hope the readers have liked the yarn as well as I liked writing it."

Our Artists

The artists represented in this issue are Margaret Brundage (the cover), Virgil Finlay *(Loot of the Vampire)*, Harold De Lay *(Black Canaan)*, James Napoli *(The House of the Evil Eye)*, Frank Utpatel *(The Telephone in the Library)*, Hugh Rankin *(The Ruler of Fate)*, Andrew Brosnatch (the Eyrie).

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite in this issue? In the April issue, two stories are in a neck and neck race for first place: *The Druidic Doom*, by Robert Bloch, and the concluding installment of *The Hour of the Dragon*, by Robert E. Howard. Let us know your preferences. Write a letter, or cut out the coupon on this page, and send it to the Eyrie, in care of WEIRD TALES.

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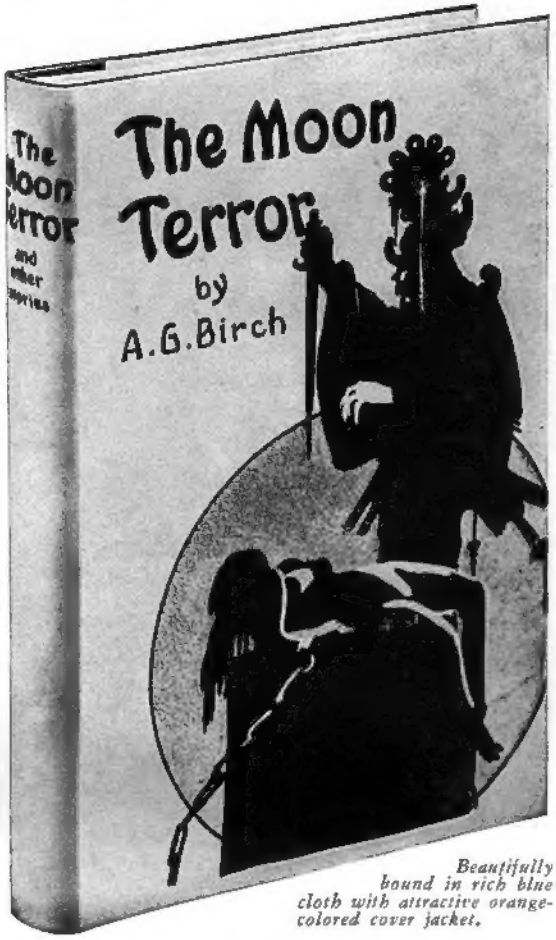

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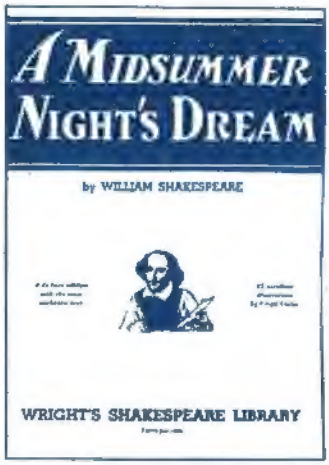

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